

The Fifth Pillar

*THE STORY OF A PILGRIMAGE
TO MECCA AND MEDINA*

SAIDA MILLER KHALIFA

Foreword by
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*Allah—there is no God but He, the Ever-Living,
the Self-subsisting by whom all subsist.
Slumber overtakes Him not, nor sleep.
To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and
whatever is in the earth.
Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission?
He knows what is before them and what is behind them.
And they encompass nothing of His knowledge except
what He pleases.
His throne encompasses the heavens and the earth, and the
preservation of them both tires Him not.
And He is the Most High, the Great.*

[The Throne Verse: The Qur'an]

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Foreword

Many concepts exist within the horizons of pilgrimage and in the souls of pilgrims, which can be seen by him who has a clear mind and who reflects. Pilgrimage means devotion and spiritual refreshment of varying degrees to different people; it means leaving home and family for the sake of God. It means traveling to worship God, a journey inspired by piety.

The reflective mind can sense the spiritual atmosphere that overwhelms the pilgrim and can see the way it affects his behavior while he is on his way to God's Inviolable House.

The pilgrim's spiritual condition and feelings become different from what they were. His feelings become more transparent. When he cleanses himself and dresses in his special *Ihram* garments, when he sets out on the journey of pilgrimage and whenever he stops at the various landmarks on his way to the sacred land, his spirit glows. This illumination of the spirit intensifies whenever the pilgrim declares the traditional answer to the call of God and his sincere belief in the Unity and Greatness of God.

The pilgrim with a clear mind can also perceive in the sites of pilgrimage signs of sacredness and purity. He can see the very first house ever built on Earth for the worship of God and the places where God's messages were revealed, tangible records of Islamic events connected to the various *Qur'anic* revelations.

Lo! The first sanctuary appointed for mankind was that at Mecca, a blessed place, a guidance to the peoples; wherein are clear signs.

[Surah III, Verse 96]

This verse is eternally there for all to read.

From the rites of pilgrimage radiate many exalted ideas. The circumambulation of the *Kaabah* and the pilgrims gathering around it are manifestations of the Muslims' unity. They are bound by the bond of faith, the bond of God.

The *Saie*, the sevenfold walking between the two hills called Safa and Marwa could be taken as symbolizing a search for a goal and finding it in fulfilling the order of God Who owns heaven and Earth.

The throwing of the pebbles at Mina could be seen as symbolizing the unity of Muslims, throwing as if with one united hand in denouncing evil.

Anyone who visits the Prophet's mosque (May peace and blessings be on him!) will be aware of how much the Muslims honor and love him and how much they revere the blessed place where the angel Gabriel delivered the divine message to the Prophet.

The congregation of Muslims in Medina, the first home for the Islamic community, and the places where the Prophet and his friends lived their faith and set ideal examples for mankind, show many signs for those who meditate. Many other signs can be found by those who look, think, and study. The universal abiding peace which enfolds the vast crowds of pilgrims is complete, a peace not enforced by law or out of fear of worldly punishment. It is rather a peace maintained by spiritual harmony that penetrates the emotions, controlling them by the Muslim's response to God's command;

The pilgrimage is [in] the well-known months, and whoever is minded to perform the pilgrimage therein [let him remember that] there is [to be] no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage. And whatsoever good ye do Allah knoweth it. So make provision for yourselves [hereafter]; for the best provision is piety. Therefore keep your duty to Me, O men of understanding.

[Surah II, Verse 197]

Peace covers space, time, and all living things during pilgrimage. Peace upon mankind and upon animals and even upon plants. Animals have no fear of pilgrims:

O ye who believe! Kill no wild game while ye are on the pilgrimage. Whoso killeth it of set purpose he shall pay its forfeit in the equivalent of that which he has killed, of domestic animals, the judge to be two men among you known for justice, [the forfeit] to be brought as an offering to the Kaabah; or, for expiation, he shall feed poor persons, or the equivalent thereof in fasting, that he may taste the evil consequences of his deed.

[Surah V, Verse 95]

Animals large and small, even as small as the locust, are secure with pilgrims. It was reported by the scholar Malek that a pilgrim told the Caliph Omar Ibn el Khattab, "I killed a locust with my whip while in my *Ihram*." So Omar ordered him to give a handful of food in repentance.

Any aggression endangering living things is forbidden for pilgrims while in their state of *Ihram*. Whoever breaks this divine prohibition must offer a sacrifice or do a charitable act willingly as an act of mercy, seeking God's forgiveness and compassion. If unable to perform a charitable deed, the wrongdoer may fast in submission and obedience to God.

Even plants are secure in God's sacred place, Mecca. The Prophet (Peace be upon him!) was quoted as saying, "Verily this city is inviolable by God's order until the Day of Judgment. Its plants shall not be cut, its wild animals shall not ever be disturbed, and no valuable shall be picked up except by him who recognizes it as his."

Similarly, the city of the Prophet, Medina, is inviolable and secure for living things. The Prophet (Peace be upon him!) was quoted by Al-Bokhary as saying, "All Medina between Eer and Thawor mountains is inviolable. Whoever violates its sacredness or gives refuge to a violator in it will be cursed by God, the

angels and all the people. God will not accept from him any of his deeds."

Such a total peace is now almost like a dream for the rest of mankind: peace of man with himself, with his fellow-man, and with all living things around him. But it is enjoyed by pilgrims at God's sacred House and is not to be found in any other society. Its regulations were laid down for all Muslims by the Prophet in the following words from his sermon given on his last pilgrimage, "O people! God has made your blood and property inviolable among you, to the same extent he made this day inviolable in this inviolable place. . . . Have I delivered the message to you?"

The congregation answered "Yes!"

The Prophet (Peace be upon him!) said, "God be our Witness! God be our Witness! God be our Witness!"

Thus the exalted concepts contained in the pilgrimage are very many, perceived by him who meditates and reflects on its various rites. The material aspects of people are not important; rather should one reflect on the rites, study them, and think of their spiritual significance.

The writer of this book has been attentive to some of the exalted spiritual meanings during her journey of pilgrimage. She has also looked at her fellow pilgrims' social behavior, their customs and everyday life during the *Hajj*.

We truly wish her continued guidance whenever she writes about Islam, its glorious ideals and principles. May God reward her for her exalted aim and for the truthfulness of her reporting.

And from God is all guidance.

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Lastly, my fervent thanks to my dear husband, without whose enthusiastic support and invaluable assistance this personal narrative could never have been written.

Prologue

*By heaven and the night-star!
And what shall teach thee what is the night-star?
The piercing star!
Over every soul there is a watcher.*

[The Qur'an]

Although pilgrimage to holy places has long been a rite shared by the religions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, it reached its zenith under Islam. For the *Qur'an* proclaimed it the duty of every able Muslim at least once in his or her lifetime to visit Mecca. Ever since the Call, the *Kaabah*, "The House of God," in Mecca has been the religious center of the whole Muslim world.

Because of their sacred associations, Mecca, and Medina where the Prophet is buried, have for fourteen centuries been held taboo for non-Muslims. The holy cities are situated in that western coastal area of Saudi Arabia called the *Hejaz*. All the *Hejaz* is held to be sacred territory, and it has always been extremely difficult and dangerous for a non-Muslim to enter. But, human nature being what it is, "forbidden fruit is sweetest," and, ever since the sixteenth century, various Europeans traveling in disguise as Persians, Afghans, or Turks have joined the great Pilgrimage caravans bound for Arabia. Driven by insatiable curiosity, these few travelers braved the dangers of that incredible journey, hopeful that at its end they would penetrate the mysteries of the holy cities. Not all of them succeeded. But it is perhaps of interest to note some of their names. "The first of the pilgrims [from

Europe] who has left an authentic account of the holy cities is Ludovico Bartema, gentleman of the city of Rome," wrote Sir Richard Burton at the end of his second volume on the Pilgrimage.* Bartema arrived in Mecca in 1503. Next came Joseph Pitts, an English sailor who traveled to Arabia as the slave of an Algerian pirate by whom he was captured in 1678. In 1814, an Italian named Giovanni Finati who professed to be a Muslim, had the opportunity of seeing Mecca while serving with an Albanian force in the *Hejaz*, under the command of the celebrated Muhammad Ali. Finati took the name of *Haji Mahomet*. The curious can read vivid excerpts from the accounts of all three in Burton's book.

Other non-Arabian travelers were Ali Bey, in 1807; Burckhardt, in 1814; Burton, in 1853; Abd el Razzaq, in 1858; Von Maltzan, in 1865; and Snouk Hurgronje in 1884. Nearer our own time, Philby made the journey in 1933.

The dangers then were very real, for, even as late as 1910, we read reports that up to one-third of an entire pilgrim caravan could be lost yearly, "perishing by their own negligence or by misfortune—dying some of thirst, others of fatigue and sickness, others at the hand of robbers on the way."† The bones of camels and men were left to line the route. No wonder those hardy enough to survive the months, sometimes years, of weary traveling—the poorest sustained only by faith, hope and charity—were welcomed home with days of rejoicing and feasting.

Of course, the large companies of pilgrims journeyed together for reasons of safety as well as convenience. The two principal pilgrim caravans used to start yearly from Damascus and Cairo. The Cairo one was joined by the North African caravan en route to the Red Sea. The Damascus one was joined by groups from Anatolia, Kurdistan, Mesopotamia, and Syria. Other smaller caravans consisted of Persians, Indians, Malays, and southern and eastern Arabs from Yemen and Nejd.

**Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, by Sir Richard Burton.

†*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1926.

Since the routes were well known, guides were not always taken along. Bedouin tribesmen offered themselves as escorts, but, tragically for some of the pilgrims, these tribesmen might belong to those bands of wild and reckless men who ruled certain parts of the route. From their mountain hiding places, these bandits would cut off the passes, demanding payment before allowing caravans to proceed. They shot at soldiers, robbed the pilgrims, and closed the roads. Burton was of the opinion that a strong-hearted despot like Muhammad Ali could have purged the *Hejaz* in one generation of these pests, foreseeing the rise of the *Wahabis* to do just this.

The Syrian caravan was headed by the Pasha of Damascus or his representative; the Egyptian, by an emir or ruler appointed by Cairo. The smaller caravans each had their own emir and agent whose business it was to look after provisions and water. These dignitaries usually journeyed with numerous retinues of servants and attendants. A considerable force of soldiery convoyed the Egyptian and Syrian caravans, but their protection was not always effective against robbers.

Traveling with the Damascus caravan from Medina to Mecca, Burton witnessed the terrible confusion following an attack by robbers. He was scathing in his criticism of the irregular horsemen who, "perfectly useless, galloped up and down over the stones, shouting to and ordering one another." The Pasha of the army, meanwhile, "debated over his pipe with the officers what should be done."

It was at this point that the fierce Wahabis, later destined to rule Arabia, appeared on the scene. They came galloping up on their camels, "their elf-locks tossing in the wind, and their flaring matches casting a strange lurid light over their features." Forming themselves into two bodies, the first began firing at the robbers perched on the hillsides, while the second swarmed up the slope, ably led by a brave Sharif from Medina. Very fortunately for the pilgrims, this Sharif had sworn to accompany the caravan until it reached Mecca.

Once again, the great winding procession of animals, men, and women was under way. Among the vast concourse were

those who walked, the Indian pilgrims, for instance, whose poverty was so extreme that they were never in danger of being robbed. Sad to say, many of the old, the weak, and the ailing among those who walked, who were too poor to hire an animal, became ill on the way and died. They were buried beside the trail in graves dug by the hands of their companions. Superhuman indeed was the endurance required by the poorest when the pitiless sun shone down in summer and when winter found them shivering in their thin cotton garments as they struggled over the mountain passes. Many were kept alive only through the kindness of their more fortunate companions. But it must be remembered that for every *Haj*—past or present—the setting out on the sacred journey is an occasion of such joyfulness, the journey itself undertaken in a spirit of such faith and hope, that every hardship met with is endured as patiently as possible. Every *Haj* and *Haja* knows that, by fulfilling the rites of Pilgrimage correctly, he or she is carrying out the command of God. If, as now and then happens, bodily hardship is suffered on the journey, the pilgrim tries to endure it without complaint—sure in the faith that paradise awaits in the end, on the other side of pain.

What a contrast to the ordeals of travel in the past are the relative luxury of ship, plane, bus, and taxi today—magic carpets for the *Hujjaj*! There are countless blessings to be thankful for; comfortable, fast transportation, abundant food and water, economical accommodations, safety of person and property, antibiotics, and speedily available medical aid.

In order to appreciate the drastic changes for the better in the last fifty years, it may be of interest to review briefly Saudi Arabia's more recent history. Modern Saudi Arabia was really created by King Ibn Saud. He was "responsible for almost everything that makes vast stretches of barren land and a heterogenous mixture of tribes into a national organism."* Gifted with military genius and political shrewdness, he was able to lead his fearless *Wahabi* warriors to fight and conquer all his enemies. By 1934,

*From *Islam Today*, Arberry and Landau, eds.

he reigned supreme in the Arabian Peninsula. (The Turkish Caliphate, which had never enjoyed more than a nominal rule, had been abolished in 1924.)

Once established as the undisputed ruler of Arabia, King Ibn Saud began to realize his ambitions and institute the wholesale reforms which were to be carried out on a religious basis. Education, administration, agriculture, cattle-breeding, transportation, communications—all involved new methods which were first introduced by the king despite initial opposition from reluctant diehards. It is only since King Ibn Saud's stern reforms, dating from 1926, when he became ruler of the *Hejaz*, that the Pilgrimage became completely safe for travelers. With the vast oil revenues, the king's plans could be realized and the stabilization of the country completed. In a few years, what had been a lawless and backward land split by intertribal rivalry, a country with only a modest income was transformed into one of safety, communal interests, and immense prosperity. King Ibn Saud's wise rule was continued by his son, King Feisal, whose tragic assassination in 1975 has resulted in his brother's taking the helm of the ship of state. King Khaled is holding her steady on the same prudent course.

The yearly Pilgrimage, one of the chief sources of national income and involving extremely complex and important organization, has been made so much easier for the *Hujjaj* by constant improvement in reception, transportation, and health care.

Then, too, extensive additions to the great mosque in Mecca, the *Haram*, are making it one of the loveliest buildings to be seen on Earth.

* * *

The story of the Prophet Muhammad's* first experience of divine revelation has come down to us, shining through the cen-

*It is the Islamic tradition that, whenever a prophet's name is mentioned, particularly Muhammad's, it is followed by the phrase, "May God's peace and blessing be on him."

turies. The Prophet's early biographers have recorded accounts of his Call. We are told he regularly used to leave Mecca in search of peace and solitude. He would climb the rocky slopes of the mountain named Hiraa, which is situated a few miles north-east of the city, to a cave high up near the summit. Safe in his cave, remote and alone, Muhammad would remain for days at a time, fasting, meditating and praying in the way of the biblical prophets before him.

Then, one celestial night, known ever since in Islam as the "Night of Majesty," or "Power," the angel Gabriel came to him while he was contemplating in the cave.

Suddenly, Muhammad was startled to hear a strange, unearthly voice speaking in high, clear tones:

*Read!**

Read! In the Name of thy Lord Who creates—

Creates man from a clot,

Read! And thy Lord is most generous,

Who taught man by the pen,

Taught man what he knew not.

Insistently, the voice repeated the words until Muhammad had memorized them. But he was full of fear and wonder. Who could be speaking? He looked out at the night and was then filled with awe. A dazzling radiance was in the night sky, for the radiant figure of an angel was standing in the sky above the horizon, only two bowshots distant.

The unearthly voice spoke again, "O Muhammad! Thou Art Allah's messenger and I am Gabriel." The angel's splendor was so bright, Muhammad had to turn his face away. But everywhere he looked, the angel stood before him. Transfixed, the Prophet remained there gazing until at last the angel vanished.

After such intense brightness, the darkness was complete.

*Some translators render this as "Recite!"

The Prophet, in a state of extreme agitation, imagined he was going out of his mind. As fast as he could he started down the precipitous path, slipping and stumbling in the dark as he hurried the long way home. It was dawn, and Khadiga, his devoted and loyal wife, must have been alarmed to see her normally calm and grave husband suddenly appear in a state quite beside himself. But she listened quietly while he poured out his story. Then, always full of faith in her husband, she comforted him with the assurance that she certainly did not think him mad. She believed his story of the angelic vision and the words the heavenly being had spoken. Moreover, she was sure her husband's goodness of character was such that God would not allow a harmful spirit to come to him. Now she suggested that Muhammad should rest for a while and then hurried out to see an elderly relative named Waraka who was a sort of spiritual advisor. Waraka was no idol-worshipper like most of his fellow Meccans but a seeker after ultimate truths. He was, it is said, acquainted with both Judaism and Christianity. After listening to Khadiga's story, he told her he was sure a heavenly messenger had come down to Muhammad—a sign that he had been chosen by God as the Prophet for his people.

Muhammad was greatly encouraged by this unshaken confidence of both his wife and his old friend. He felt strong enough now to face the fact that he might indeed be divinely inspired and not a victim of delusions, as he knew perfectly well his enemies would later maintain.

* * *

After this first *Qur'anic* revelation, the heavenly messages continued to come down over a period of twenty-three years. They came to the Prophet in different ways and were committed to his memory and to those of his followers and were written down. Over and over again, the divine messages denounced the evils of polytheism and directed the Muslims to the worship of the One God. By the time they were completed, the revelations

covered every aspect of human conduct. They were collected and preserved unchanged for all time in the *Qur'an*, which for all Muslims is the word of God. The *Hadith*, the sayings of the Prophet, which form the second source of guidance for Muslims, were handed down by oral tradition and later reliably recorded and compiled. It is an extraordinary thought that from a beginning when the Prophet's followers numbered only three—his wife Khadiga, his cousin Ali, and his friend Abu Bakr—the followers of the faith of Islam today number around 700 million.

Introduction

*We have truly shown him the way;
he may be thankful or unthankful.*

[The Qur'an]

Twelve years before going on the *Hajj*, I had been a person without a specific faith, although I had always believed in God. Then gradually through reading, especially Pickthall's *Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, and discussion with members of a devoted group of Muslims in London, I seemed by some mysterious agency to be brought to Islam, which word means submission to the will of God. For me, there is in Islam not only a source of strength and solace, truth and peace of mind, but also a profound mystery. But then surely, do not all the great faiths have an element of mystery about them, in that they are concerned with much that is inexplicable and abstract? Mysterious, the invisible communication with the Divine Being; mysterious, the hidden bonds of kinship with fellow-believers; mysterious, the pull of the unseen, impelling countless millions to live by spiritual values.

That same unseen agency which led me to Islam seems also to have influenced my leaving England to travel to Canada, where I was convinced I would find more suitable work. It was with some trepidation, though, that I left my dearly beloved mother and father—to whom I owed everything—and said good-bye to my two brothers, Lorimer and Jonathan, whom I held equally dear. Was it merely by chance I was destined to meet and marry in Canada a man so deeply religious? My husband, who is Egyptian, like countless men of his faith was named after its

Prophet, Muhammad; and had himself been on the great Pilgrimage twice and the lesser one three times. His work as a university professor of engineering only serves to intensify his faith. Much of his spare time is taken up with religious study and with reading from the *Qur'an*. Muhammad, called by his family name of "Yusry" throughout this book, with his knowledge of the faith, has always been my best guide and counselor and, indeed, I could never have undertaken the *Hajj* without him.

In writing my personal impressions of the *Hajj*, it has not been my aim, nor would I be qualified, to include all aspects of each rite nor to delve too deeply into their historic origins. The reader wishing to learn more about this subject, including the prayers accompanying the rites will find Ahmad Kamal's book *The Sacred Journey* most informative. My aim has been simply to tell the story of my first *Hajj* and in doing so to try to convey something of the strangeness and wonder, the tumult and peace, and above all the deep spiritual enjoyment experienced in the course of its completion. It seemed to me the impact of so profound an experience on an Englishwoman like myself might be of interest to others with a Western background. At the same time, the way of life lived in this corner of the world, when circumstances require large numbers of people to coexist peacefully in a limited space, may be the subject of unusual interest. Since St. John Philby wrote about his journey some forty years ago, Saudi Arabia has seen enormous changes for the better, affecting travel also, and these changes naturally give a different feeling to the story. As far as I know, all previous accounts in English have been written by men, so a feminine viewpoint may be timely. Perhaps I should add that I have been fortunate enough to have carried out the *Hajj* five times and the *Omra* many more times since 1970. Of course my reactions to certain situations as they arose tended to be rather different from those of born Muslims coming from backgrounds with customs and traditions other than my own.

But now, if the reader has come this far with me, perhaps he will adventure further and read on until he reaches the focus of the pilgrim's dreams, Mecca the Noble, and Medina the Illuminated.

The Fifth Pillar

resolutions - money
100 no of people
symbolic stoning of the devil
conc, foreward + prologue

I

Preparations for Pilgrimage

And Pilgrimage to the House is a duty which men owe to God whoever can find a way to it, and whoever disbelieves surely God is above need of the worlds.

[The Qur'an]

It was 1970 and my third year in Egypt. Ever since my arrival, I had been wondering how and when I would be able to go on Pilgrimage with my husband.

The 1967 war with Israel had left us all in a state of shock; the tragic loss of life, the deprivation of the Suez Canal and above all the crushing defeat were blows from which it would take Egypt years to recover. As far as the Pilgrimage was concerned, pilgrims could no longer travel by ship, now that the canal was out of action, and Suez, main port of embarkation for Egyptian *Hujjaj* in the past, was out of bounds for civilians. Now the journey had to be made by plane, so the numbers of pilgrims had to be limited, and the amount of foreign currency available was restricted.

Somewhat paradoxically, despite the hardship of the journey in the old days of the caravan, the demands made by officialdom prior to departure were few. Nowadays the situation is reversed; the journey is made incomparably easier, but the setting out on it is far more difficult with so many forms to fill out and signatures and stamps to obtain from various officials.

The Egyptian Government announced that a public ballot would be held in the city zones and country districts for all those

wishing to go on the *Hajj*. However, any applicants who received invitations from relatives, friends, or the pilgrim-guides-cum-travel-agents known as *Moutawafs*, who could subsidize them during their stay in the *Hejaz* would be exempted from what came to be known as the "Toss."

In 1969, we had entered our names for the ballot but were unsuccessful, so the following year Yusry wrote to a Saudi whose name had been recommended to him. This invisible benefactor (for we never saw him) obliged us by sending an invitation. Now we had only to be officially notified before starting our preparations to leave.

That year, about thirty thousand Egyptians had applied to go, a number too great for the local air traffic to handle, despite the fleet of extra planes rented from foreign countries. The number of names drawn in the Toss was around seventeen thousand, so many were disappointed. We were very fortunate in not having to rely on the Toss.

The happy news that we would be leaving in February for *Saudeya*, as Saudi Arabia is known throughout the Arab world, reached us after months of anxious waiting. As soon as the kindly official at our local police station notified us of our departure date, Yusry and I hurried to buy the special clothing and camping equipment needed.

Yusry had been granted leave by his university, and the school at which I was then working had also agreed to my absence for a month. However, even if our employers had raised any objection, it would have made no difference, since by law in Egypt every Muslim must be allowed the time, no matter what his job, to carry out the religious duty of Pilgrimage.

Traditionally, Egyptian female pilgrims wear white. All male pilgrims of every nationality—because nationalities are immaterial as seen by Islam—must drape themselves in the two white cloths or towels prescribed for special days. They must wear this *Ihram*, usually two large white towels, although any plain white material is permissible, pinned toga-fashion. A leather money belt and shoulder bag may be worn, as well as unsewn sandals. This clothing follows the Prophet's example of displaying no ostenta-

tion in dress which might indicate a difference in rank or wealth. The simple uniformity of dress also helps the mind to concentrate on spiritual rather than worldly things.

Next we had to think about our pilgrimage clothes. As far as feminine dress is concerned, the ideal Islamic dress should cover every part of the body except the face and hands, when outside the home. The ruling for this is laid down in the Holy *Qur'an* as follows; "And let them [the believing women] wear their head coverings over their bosoms," and "... let down upon them their overgarments." The tradition of veiling the face is not Islamic in origin. However, the Prophet did advise any woman with an exceptionally pretty face to veil in the presence of strange men. Actually, the veil is a pre-Islamic custom followed in Oriental countries from very early times.

Traditional Islamic society has always been deeply concerned with the preservation of family and personal honor. Islamic rulings on feminine dress help in maintaining honor and modesty and dignity in a woman.

A shop in the center of town fitted me out with three long-sleeved, ankle-length cotton gowns. I bought two white, one green, later wishing I had bought more white because of the relative lack of washing and ironing facilities for the huge number of *Hujjaj* in Mecca and Medina. Another reason for extra white dresses is the Egyptian *Haja's* tradition of wearing a fresh, new white dress and veil for the return journey and her arrival home. White knitted cotton stockings and a long length of fine white veiling completed my outfit, and we left with the good wishes of the entire shop staff. Next, shoes. Alas! Like many another woman, I later found that my new white sandals were too small! Luckily, an old pair of summer shoes proved serviceable enough and better able to withstand a lot of wear and tear.

For Yusry's *Ihram*, we drove to old Cairo where certain little shops located in narrow winding lanes specialize in the fringed toweling, strong leather money belts and open sandals required. In the same area, canvas water bags can be bought that provide deliciously cool water for thirsty wayfarers in desert areas where no ice is available. The thick canvas is porous enough

to allow a little water to seep through, the droplets being cooled by the passing breeze. Like the traditional goatskins, these water bags take up little space when empty.

Shopping in old Cairo can be a delightful leisurely business while the customer takes his time over small glasses of refreshing mint tea provided by the proprietor.

In the afternoon we drove out to see Aisha, one of my three sisters-in-law. Aisha, who is a widow, lives with her young son, Sameh, in a snug little house near the pyramids. The road to her place has houses on its left and bright green fields on its right, beyond which the pyramids tower eternally. Unfortunately, new buildings are encroaching on the farmland, creeping across the green.

I showed Aisha my purchases. The long white gown slipped easily over my dress and was duly admired and pronounced *Kwais awy*, (very nice) by everybody including Nadia, a merry-faced young girl who was staying with Aisha. But the veil was judged too long. Aisha cut it in half, then sent Nadia out with Yusry and Sameh to buy white satin ribbon. She sat down at her venerable Singer to hem my veil for me, while I began to feel like a bride again to be the center of all this attention.

"Yusry is very happy to be going on Pilgrimage," I said above the whirr of the machine. "Of course he is;" Aisha agreed, "It is a happy journey and you will be going with him."

Aisha has made the happy journey twice herself, so may be called *Haja*. She also continues to wear her white headdress when leaving the house. It is the distinguishing mark of the *Haja* who wishes always to keep her hair covered both at prayer times and while outside her home.

The others came back with the ribbon which Aisha knew exactly where to sew onto the veiling. This done, she showed me how to arrange the veil so as to cover hair and neck, one end brought around and secured with a pearl pin to the white kerchief worn under it, and the free end of the veil allowed to fall over the shoulder.

Yusry and I exchanged smiles, realizing the time was drawing near for our departure on the sacred journey.

Later, in town, we bought a small Primus stove, a couple of

lightweight saucepans, a frying pan, a kettle, some plastic mugs and plates, and a few other items for cooking and eating. A handbook on the Pilgrimage advised taking a quantity of tinned food. I also washed and dried some rice, storing it in time for the journey. This proved a most useful addition to our subsequent diet of canned fish, vegetables, and cheese.

Not everyone knew of our proposed trip, but those shopkeepers in whom we confided when buying necessary items always earnestly requested us to pray for them when we reached the *Kaabah*, Islam's most sacred place. Egyptians are for the most part deeply religious, and to go on the *Hajj* is a wish cherished in very many hearts.

The official side of our preparations entailed several visits by Yusry to our local police station to obtain the official permits and to the specially organized air travel offices. We also called in at the local health center for the statutory inoculations against smallpox, typhoid, and cholera. The nurse there took a justifiable pride in the delicacy of her needlework and wished us a blessed journey.

Now it was time to pack our gear. We stowed food and a few extra clothes in a couple of suitcases and bundled up the camping equipment in an old green rug which Yusry knew would be useful later.

Had we been setting out from Cairo a hundred years ago, our food supplies would of course have been more extensive, bearing in mind the long journey by boat and camel. We would have laid in stores of tea, coffee, loaf sugar, rice, dates, biscuits, oil, vinegar, lanterns, and cooking pots. Several water skins would have been necessary and most likely a small tent, as well, which would in those days have cost a mere ten shillings. All these would have been packed into a hamper made of palm sticks and a huge wooden box, while the clothes would have been put into saddlebags. I can picture our loaded camel, hamper, box, and saddlebags hanging from his sides, with perhaps a cot placed on top of the load.

In both past and present, the final item bought or acquired by the pilgrim could be a shroud later to be dipped in *Zemzem* water.

II

Jeddah— Entrance to the Sacred Land

The months of Pilgrimage are well known, so whoever determines to perform Pilgrimage therein there shall be no immodest speech, nor abusing nor altercation in the Pilgrimage. And whatever good you do God knows it.

[The Qur'an]

On the morning of the great day, we were up as usual before sunrise, to say the dawn prayer, after taking the bath that must precede setting out on the *Hajj*. We put on our special *Ihram* dress, fresh and white, that would help us concentrate on spiritual things alone.

Our dawn prayers included our intention to carry out the rites first of the *Omra*, the lesser or nonobligatory Pilgrimage, and then of the great Pilgrimage which is obligatory for every Muslim with sufficient means and in good health. During the period of *Omra*, which can extend to a few days, every pilgrim must maintain a state of ritual purity that forbids—among other things—trimming the hair and nails. This amounts to an exercise in discipline besides directing of the thoughts away from personal vanity. The thoughts of women should at this time be far from personal adornment.

Wearing my spotless white from head to foot, I felt I was truly stepping from this workaday world to a better world. Our sturdy old janitor helped us downstairs with the luggage. Ezzat, one of Yusry's three brothers, was waiting for us with his car, and he drove us speedily through Cairo's demented traffic to the

airport. Cairo mornings are usually fine, but I remember that February morning as particularly lovely with the airport buildings and the planes all shimmering in the sun. Egyptian families are generally very close, and arrivals and departures of family members are occasions when everyone who can gathers at the point of departure or arrival. Our family is no exception, and the farewell deputation included two of my sisters-in-law and Yusry's three brothers, all of whom we hold dear.

Not only relatives but friends and neighbors love to bear the departing pilgrim company. The *Fellaheen* for instance, think nothing of several days' trip to speed the traveler on his way, and groups of them from the country will cheerfully spend days and nights at the airport waiting for him to arrive. Sometimes a few of their group will bring along pipes and drums to enliven the proceedings!

A huge marquee of multicolored appliquéd cloth had been set up adjoining the main building to accommodate departing pilgrim passengers. Helpful officials were everywhere at hand, and we found ourselves clear of passport and customs formalities in almost no time. Relatives and friends crowding the visitors' balcony were waving and calling down to white-clad figures below.

Just as we were about to go through to the departure lounge, a hand was laid on Yusry's arm. He turned to be hailed by a young ex-student of his, whom he later told me he had not seen for about ten years. Two ladies were with this young man; one was young, the other, an elderly *Haja*. In urgent tones, because there wasn't much time, the young man explained that he was unable to accompany his mother to Mecca. Could we look after her? Yusry agreed at once, but I must admit I was taken by surprise at this unexpected request! I found out later it is quite usual for relatives to ask someone else to look after a member of the family making the Pilgrimage alone, although generally this is arranged beforehand. Women pilgrims in particular are advised against making the *Hajj* alone; indeed the Prophet usually forbade women to do so unless accompanied by a male relative. The reasons for this will perhaps become clear as my story

unfolds. In fact, the physical strains imposed by the journey, the carrying of loads, possible troubles over transport or argument with men over payments, the chance of accidents or sickness and the importance of keeping one's footing when in the midst of great crowds are all occasions when a woman is liable to require a man's care and protection. The Prophet also recommended that a woman traveling a long distance should be accompanied by a male relative.

Of course, all this was new to me then, and I was trying to get used to the idea of having this hitherto-unknown companion traveling with us.

However, I tried not to show my apprehension when our *Haja's* tearful daughter-in-law grasped my hand and begged me to "take care of mother." I assured her we would, feeling sorry for the poor lady who looked quite lost, now that the moment had come to leave her family. The next minute I couldn't help smiling at my kindhearted husband, who was rummaging hopefully in the *Haja's* capacious handbag in search of vital documents for her, while the lady herself just stood gazing in a state of childlike wonder at the official behind the desk.

Then, formalities completed, we sat in the cafeteria sipping the local coffee from tiny cups. It is served in a way similar to Turkish coffee but is less thick, and as a rule Egyptians prefer it less sweet.

The cafeteria was filling up with white-clad *Hujjaj*. A loud-speaker was broadcasting religious songs accompanied by vigorous drumbeats. Paperback copies of the *Qur'an* were handed out free to those who wanted them. At the next table a solitary *Haj* sat quietly smoking. Poor *Haja* Wadida, for that was her name, began to cry silently. Was the prospect of this journey into the unknown without her family too overwhelming? I patted her hand sympathetically. Unfortunately my Arabic was too inadequate to be of much comfort to her, so we could only sit smiling and nodding at each other.

Suddenly everyone was on his feet and moving toward the exits, a throng of men and women all in white. Relatives and friends crowded the observation balcony, waving and calling out:

"*Tigi bis salaama!*" ("Return in peace and safety.") We walked out into the bright morning, the air shimmering in the sun. Everyone surged toward the waiting bus, eager to board the plane, but an official in blue stopped us and begged us to stand in line—a difficult request for some of our more impatient company.

On the bus, the first voice was raised in the age-old cry, "*Labbaikallahoma labbaik!*" ("I answer O Lord your call!"), which should be repeated loudly by men and quietly by women. (Female pilgrims must avoid drawing any attention to themselves which might prove a distraction from the purely religious purpose of the journey.) This ancient and time-honored cry should be repeated as often as possible up to the first sight of the *Kaabah*.

Aboard the United Arab Airlines turbojet, the chanting grew in volume, one strong male voice leading, the others echoing;

Labbaikallahoma Labbaik!

Labbaika la shareeka laka labbaik

Innal Hamda, wan neamata, laka wal mulk

La shareeka lak.

(Here I come in answer to Thee my Lord!

There are no associates with Thee O Lord

Verily Thine are the praise, the blessings and the Kingdom

There are no associates with Thee my Lord.)

We took off, the plane lifting strongly and steadily on her course. We pilgrims were on a magic carpet borne aloft with a humming sound above which floated the repeated chanting of Abraham's ancient call, helping to unite those who had been till now strangers to one another.

Islam is based on five pillars, all of which are basic for the faith. These are; first, belief in the Oneness of God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God; second, the saying of the five daily prayers; third, payment of alms to the poor; fourth, fasting during the month of Ramadan; fifth, the carrying out of Pilgrimage for those who are able to do so.

Pilgrims of course come from all walks of life. I was later to see people of all ages and of an extraordinary diversity of races and physical types, some people who expressed themselves in elegant speech and others in the simplest ways. But the amazing fact was that no differences of any kind counted, because, no matter what the background or customs or rank in life, the ultimate purpose of the journey makes all men brothers and all women sisters. Kings and princes, presidents and diplomats, bankers and merchants, writers and university professors mingle with farmers and shopkeepers, students and clerks, tailors and cobblers and many a friendship is made on the *Hajj*. Often the pilgrim finds himself traveling with *Hujjaj* unknown at the start but with whom he is firm friends by the end of the journey. I myself had many a pleasant chat with *Hajas* while waiting for the prayers and during our camp life in Mina.

I glanced out of the window. A silver wing obscured the view, but I caught a glimpse of tawny desert far below. I thought of earlier pilgrims about whom I had read. How astonished they would have been, those wayfarers of past centuries, if, as they rode or plodded the weary miles of caravan routes through desert wastes and lonely valleys, they could have known that one day in the future great silver metallic birds would carry passengers and cargo speedily through the skies. And those pilgrims too frequently herded together in certain ramshackle, unseaworthy craft whose rapacious owners cared nothing for the safety and comfort of their passengers. What a wonder to them would have been the swift comfortable flight with ample food and drink that today we take so for granted!

I looked at *Haja* Wadida sitting beside me. Her eyes were closed; her lips were moving in prayer. Perhaps she was nervous about flying, as she had told me this was her first flight. Hoping to reassure her a little, I took her hand and was rewarded with an answering pressure and a smile.

No air hostesses had yet appeared, but they were probably preparing the lunch trays, for the flight from Cairo to Jeddah is only about one and a half hours. When, a few minutes later, they brought us a good meal of meat and rice, I was struck by the

contrast between the girls' uniforms, of sleeveless blouses and mini-skirts, and the white draperies of the *Hajas* swathed from head to foot.

Difference in dress, however, is one of the features of the fascinating Cairo scene, where the simple flowing lines of the men's *galabeyas* and the turbans or skullcaps they wear mingle with the, to my mind, duller Western style for men. It is interesting that an increasing number of women and girls now dress according to the Islamic rule, that is, their hair completely covered by a large scarf, usually white, and their figures covered by long dresses or coats and jackets and floor-length skirts. Traditionally the Egyptian country woman and the *Baladi*, or local woman, are distinguished by their long dress, either colored or black, and the black wrapper worn over the head and shoulders. But naturally their more sophisticated sister prefers to be more in fashion.

Traditions are sometimes hard to break with, and, although the *Haja*, like the *Haj*, is supposed to wear white while carrying out the rites, there are very many who feel happier in their usual black. The Bedouin women, for instance, always seemed to be in black, as later on I was to see them led by their men through the crowds to carry out the rites. On our second Pilgrimage, the three country women from southern Egypt who stayed in the room next to ours in the Mecca house wore only black. One day, perhaps, I shall know the reason for this preference.

But my reflections on these differences in feminine dress were suddenly broken by the ringing tones, over the aircraft's loud-speaker system, of a sheikh delivering a sermon on the *Hajj* and quoting the *Qur'anic* verses mentioning it, advising the pilgrim of his duties and obligations to God. Now we were circling widely before landing gently at Jeddah Airport.

We emerged from the plane to see the airport near barren, undulating desert. A parade of passenger planes from various Islamic countries was drawn up in front of the airport building. Inside the reception block we joined the crowds of newly arrived pilgrims. I was fascinated by the rich diversity of nationalities, the vivid colors of characteristic national dress; there were olive-

skinned Egyptians in the white *Ihram*, the women in long white gowns; chocolate-brown Sudanese men in sugar-white gowns, their flowing turbans wreathing brilliant tangerine skullcaps fairer-skinned Tunisian men wearing voluminous dark-brown robes and scarlet skullcaps, the women in floor-length white or green coatdresses slit at the hem and with attached conical hoods. Women from Central Africa wore multicolored long skirts and sweeping sari-type garments, boldly patterned, over their blouses, their hair concealed by immense patterned bandanas. Mothers among them marched up to the reception counter balancing enormous baskets on their heads and with tiny babies bound to their backs by cloth strips.

There was a babel of languages. Many of the *Hujjaj* spoke no Arabic. On arrival, every pilgrim should give the name of the travel agent who will look after him during his stay, but some did not know this, besides being unable to speak the language. A great deal of patience and brotherly understanding was shown by the Jeddah Airport officials in solving everyone's problems.

Perhaps at this point the function of the travel agent, the *Moutawaf*, in the Pilgrimage season should be made clear. First, his employment is purely seasonal, i.e., during the Pilgrimage months only, the last two months of the Arabic lunar year. Second, the *Moutawaf* forms a link between government and pilgrim, enjoying a special fee in return for handling passports, customs clearance, accommodation and transport; third, he is qualified to act as a guide throughout the religious rites with which very many may be unfamiliar. *Moutawafs* generally lodge their clients in private houses which may be rented for the season, or in their own. Hotels, especially those near the city centers are so expensive as to be beyond the reach of most.

Frequently a *Moutawaf* will specialize in dealing with pilgrims of one nationality. It may be for instance, that he is married to a wife from outside Saudi Arabia and prefers to look after her fellow-countrymen, being already familiar with their language and some of their ways. The cheapest accommodation is of course to share a room with others, which usually results in the sexes being segregated. The women's rooms are called *Hareem*, a word

deriving from *Haraam*, the forbidden (i.e., to men other than the husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons of the female occupants).

Due to the ever-increasing number of pilgrims every year and the relative smallness of the cities of Jeddah, Mecca, and Medina, no one is permitted to stay too long in any of these cities, or to leave them until official permission is granted.

The passport of each *Haj* is handled by his *Moutawaf* throughout the different stages of the journey. Numerous *Moutawafs* are honest and sincere men; some unfortunately are not. However, one should not expect them all to be paragons of virtue merely because they live in the vicinity of the holy places. They have their faults, like everyone else.

As Ahmad Kamal remarks in his book *The Sacred Journey*, "These pilgrim guides are to be found in every land where Muslims dwell except those under alien rule or domination . . . there are many who are capable and sincere, there are others who are neither." He goes on to say,

The sincere pilgrim guide protects his followers from rapacious shopkeepers, bargains on their behalf, and acts as their interpreter. He is father, brother, servant, and guide, and has been called the camel of the pilgrim. His responsibility does not end until the last of his party has completed the Pilgrimage and is embarked on the vessel, aircraft, or other means of transport which is to bear him homeward.

But now, barely an hour after my arrival in Jeddah, I was suddenly faced with an unexpected setback. As is well known, no one is allowed to enter the sacred cities unless he or she is a genuine Muslim. But Yusry and I had completely overlooked the fact that nowhere in my British passport was it stated I was a Muslim. What was worse, there was no official Egyptian declaration to this effect either. We had thought, erroneously, that my official clearance in Cairo would be sufficient—but it was useless to claim this with the Saudi immigration officials—how were they to know I was a bona fide Muslim? We waited, sitting on a bench, while a couple of men from immigration discussed what was to be done. In the end, they decided the English *Haja* must

take an oath the next day before the Supreme Court judge to prove she had adopted the faith correctly.

I looked at *Haja Wadida* who clearly was again on the verge of tears. Poor soul! No doubt she was already regretting having been entrusted to our keeping since this seemed to involve too much frustrating waiting about on her part. Like all the faithful, she was anxious to be on her way to the *Kaabah*, the focal point of Islam.

As we waited, a couple of planeloads of Indonesian *Hujjaj* streamed in, looking exotic with their fine, delicate features, dark Western-style suits and little black skullcaps. A few of the men already wore the *Ihram*, and most of the *Hajas* were in their national dress, graceful and dignified, later to be changed for their *Ihram*.

At last, having given the name of the *Moutawaf* with whom we would be staying in Mecca, we were allowed to leave the building. By this time we were hot and tired. The weather was warm after the temperate Egyptian winter. We collected our baggage, plus *Haja Wadida's* unbelievably heavy suitcase and stumbled through to a wide courtyard which was enclosed by a low quadrangle three stories high. Here were located the offices of the numerous *Moutawafs* and the free hostel for *Hujjaj*. Hot and footsore, *Haja Wadida* and I stood in the midst of the throng of pilgrims most of whom were standing surrounded by their piles of luggage. Just then, a short bespectacled *Haja* darted from the crowd to be greeted with delight by *Haja Wadida*. It seems they were old friends. However, they had only exchanged a few sentences when a brace of diminutive young porters appeared, oddly dignified despite their ragged work clothes of saronglike skirts and cotton vests. Bulky turbans wreathed their heads and wide, metal-studded leather money belts were buckled round their slim waists. "Belonging to Thakafy?" they asked cheerfully. "*Aiwan*," yes, we replied thankfully. Yusry joined us. He had gone off with a small guide to find our *Moutawaf's* representative in the hope that we could collect our passports and leave for Mecca. But my problem was delaying us so it seemed best to spend the night in the hostel.

We followed our porters as, laden with our luggage, they

climbed a couple of flights of stone stairs overlooking the congested courtyard and walked along a balcony situated above the entrance to the airport building. From there, a crackling loud-speaker voice was blaring the names of the *Moutawafs* ceaselessly, a blare which was to continue day and night. Our room turned out to be a huge one with beds for about fifteen people. Some previous birds of passage had left a residue from their brief alighting in the form of a litter of stale crusts, orange peel, and wastepaper on the dusty floor. We found three beds in one corner, their mattresses and cotton coverlets rather the worse for wear, but nobody minded, for here was a place to lie down and a roof overhead, costing nothing. I looked around at our fellow-pilgrims; some beds were occupied by African men, others by women *Hujjaj*. I must confess I had not till then realized that both sexes might be sharing the same room! However, with the female pilgrims so bundled up in their bulky gowns and headveils, I doubt whether their male counterparts were much troubled by their presence at night! Then, throughout the Pilgrimage, very many deeply devout *Hujjaj* spend much of their spare time praying, reading, and reciting from and meditating on the *Qur'an*, their thoughts far from the everyday occurrences going on around them.

Across the room in the opposite corner, two Tunisian *Hajas* were sitting on their beds, faces half-hidden by their pointed hoods. One of them had hands stained dark brown with henna, a striking contrast to her pale face.

Yusry and *Haja Wadida* went out to look for something to add to our picnic supper. I unpinned my voile head scarf for coolness; the smaller cotton one tied firmly underneath made sure my hair was properly covered.

Venturing along the corridor I made the reassuring discovery that the large washroom at the end was kept washed clean as the decks of any self-respecting ship by male attendants vigorously plying hose and broom. For use by both sexes, the washroom had a stone trough at one end provided for the ritual washing. Somehow, despite the lack of handles on a number of lavatory doors and the absence of locks (a number of public lavatories

were of the hole-in-the-floor variety), one learned to adapt; indeed one had to! There was always a tap near the floor with hose attached, or a metal jug to be filled with water for cleansing purposes. However, the pilgrim reception and washroom arrangements have been and are being extensively enlarged and improved during the past few years, so there is now no need to share the latter facilities with the opposite sex.

It may be of interest to note in passing that Muslims prefer to use plenty of water rather than rely entirely on toilet paper, and most modern bathrooms of the moderately well to do in Muslim countries have bidets.

More pilgrims drifted in. Yusry and *Haja* Wadida came back with apples and Coca-Colas, which, with the sandwiches we had left and some chicken brought from home and generously shared by *Haja* Wadida, made our supper a feast. I was glad to see her looking more cheerful after the little walk and some refreshment. Over supper we discussed the possible difficulties that might arise from the lack of any official recognition that I was a Muslim. We had to face the possibility of being held up in Jeddah for days. At the worst, I might even be refused entry to the holy city.

Poor *Haja* Wadida's face began to look woebegone. As we reviewed the difficulties, perhaps because she was overtired from all she had gone through that day, she began quietly to weep again. O dear! It was difficult to know how best to comfort her when we ourselves were unsure of our immediate plans. It was precisely because of these stresses and strains imposed by the *Hajj* that the Prophet encouraged women to undertake it only if accompanied by a man. Indeed, this advice applied to all long journeys.

My husband had a heart-to-heart talk with our tearful charge. Would she not prefer to travel to Mecca ahead of us instead of having to wait about in Jeddah? After all, she would travel safely in the company of other *Hujjaj*, and she had a *Moutawaf's* address in Mecca, where we would, *Inshallah*, rejoin her as soon as my problem had been cleared up.

At least this would avoid further delay for her. With a tremulous smile, she agreed, then lay back to rest while Yusry and I

went down to try to locate our passports. Glancing back, I felt a qualm for her, far from her family and looking, as she lay there in her white draperies, eyes closed in her still face, like a figure carved of stone.

The central courtyard was now packed with pilgrims, some standing, some camping in the open—sitting or lying among the mountains of bedding, prayer rugs, baggage and cooking utensils. Others were intent on saying their prayers in spaces so minute that sundry articles had to be pushed aside with every prostration. Saudi porters in red-and-white-checked *Kufeya* headcloths, loaded with baggage, staggered between the standing and sitting groups, those praying and the inert forms of sleeping *Hujjaj*. Saudi Boy Scouts detailed to help were offering assistance where needed. All the time, over and above the hubbub of voices speaking in different languages, the loudspeaker continued to blare the names of *Moutawafs* who would presently come or send their assistants to receive the *Hujjaj* in their charge.

We climbed an outside flight of stairs to the *Moutawaf's* office, where we sat and waited on a high, carpeted bench outside the door. A young boy stationed by a perpetually steaming kettle brought us glasses of tea at the *Moutawaf's* kind request. Pungent fumes of tobacco smoke from a *Shisha* (hubble-bubble) our neighbor on the next bench was enjoying floated past us. After a while we were directed back to the office we had entered on arrival. This time we were told to wait and see the *Moudir*, the director. Sitting on a bench, we watched the incoming tide of *Hujjaj* as the big jet airliners screamed in from Malaya, Pakistan, North and West Africa.

An hour or so passed by with no sign of the *Moudir*, so we went back to our room, threading our way through the crowd.

It was almost midnight, and everyone there was asleep while the lights still burned: twenty weary pilgrims, some lying on the floor, dark limbs sprawled in all directions. It was hot, as someone had switched off the fans, perhaps because the noise kept people awake. *Haja* Wadida lay sleeping soundly as a child.

Next morning, a little group of Sudanese *Hajas* were brewing tea on their Primus. Friendly African *Hujjaj* invited us to take

a cup with them, but we felt embarrassed to accept when our own tea-making equipment was buried too deeply in the green bundle to be able to return their hospitality. But we were longing for a cup of tea so went out in search of one, leaving *Haja Wadida* still peacefully sleeping. We picked our way through the packed courtyard and found ourselves in the street. On the other side was a row of tiny, impromptu cafés where ragged boys vied for customers, calling out the cheerful greeting, "*Marhaban ya Haj! Marhaban ya Haj!*" (Welcome O Pilgrim! Welcome O Pilgrim!) Each boy would rush toward the prospective patron, almost dragging him to the two or three shaky little tables, either decked out in brightly colored plastic or else left bare and tea-stained, which, together with the few rickety chairs made up the café. Then, having captured his customer the boy would shout the order triumphantly to his equally ragged partner perched behind the Primus among cartons of Lipton tea bags, tins of Kraft cheese, packets of English biscuits, American cigarettes, and crates of soft drinks.

Later that morning, we waited in the courtyard with *Haja Wadida* who seemed more cheerful after we had breakfasted together on the remains of our food. I was later to notice the vast supplies of food carried by very many pilgrims, especially pulses, cereals, and grains which could be cooked up into nourishing stews and dished out in large helpings.

In the days of the caravan, larger supplies still had to be carried not only to provide food for the journey but also to exchange for hospitality or to give in charity. In addition, some grain had to be taken along to feed the pigeons which enjoy a special status in the sacred places of Mecca and Medina. Families used to bake for weeks to provide quantities of bread and biscuits for the travelers.

Our little group now included *Haja Zeinab*, an Egyptian lady also traveling alone. She was a charming person, gentle and kind, and was perhaps in her early fifties. We had met earlier outside the *Moutawaf's* office. I admired her attitude, an enviable blend of the philosophical and humorous that remained unruffled despite the prolonged periods of waiting amid all the

hubbub and confusion. To my regret, we lost sight of *Haja Zeinab* and never saw her again.

A party of Nigerian *Hajas*, faces slashed with tribal scars, squatted nearby in the effortless way of Eastern and African people. Their small, shy children peeped at us from behind their mothers' skirts.

Yusry came back from the *Moutawaf's* office with his passport but not mine. With an hour or two to spare, we had time to do an errand.

A taxi took us to the Bank of Cairo, where a sum of money transferred from abroad awaited us. Every car and taxi that passed looked big, new, and American to our eyes, which were accustomed to the numerous ancient models on the Cairo scene. Indeed, Jeddah impressed us as unexpectedly North American in character, with modern office blocks and apartment buildings and hotels. The citizens, though, were fascinatingly different in dress, manner, and language. The Arabian accent and certain of their verbal expressions are naturally closer to the classical Arabic than those heard in Egypt.

Later, walking through the back streets, we found something of the old city in narrow lanes winding between tall houses that leaned toward each other as if fearing the encroaching modernism. We learned subsequently that the locally quarried coral blocks from which the houses are built rapidly crumble and decay. When Burckhardt, the famous Swiss traveler visited Jeddah early in the nineteenth century, he commented, "No buildings of ancient date are observed in Djidda, the madrepor (coralline) rock being of such a nature that it rapidly decays when exposed to the rain and moist atmosphere pervading here." The combination of an extremely high summertime humidity, age, poor foundations, and salty soil also tend to weaken the tall old buildings.

During our taxi ride, I noticed only a few women in the streets, and their black veils and *Abayas* were a sharp contrast to the white gowns of the men. However, on other occasions I was to notice foreign women in European dress. Someone had told me once that certain wealthy Saudi ladies flew to Paris to buy their clothes. Back home again, their families would be regaled with a

parade of costly Paris creations bearing their glamorous labels, while at other times they would be admired by women friends and acquaintances, since social events require strict segregation of the sexes. Leaving the house, women cover themselves in the black *Abaya* and veil their faces from the eyes of strange men.

The bank was cool, air-conditioned, and very North American, except for the absence of glass between customers and staff, plus the fact that the all-male staff were wearing sugar-white gowns and headdresses. Large piles of banknotes were stacked within easy reach of the customer, but who would dare rob a bank in Saudi Arabia knowing the Islamic penalty for stealing? Having collected our money, we returned to the airport building and our vigil beside the *Moudir's* office. That dignitary was still expected hourly. In my estimation, he was becoming an almost mythical figure.

A long line of Ghanians was queuing up by the reception counter. The women wore boldly patterned bright cotton wrappers and carried their bundles gracefully on their heads. It was a charming sight, that living frieze of stately dark-skinned figures.

In the Oriental world, one can either wait for incredibly long periods or find one's business concluded with lightning speed, largely depending on whom one knows. Certainly Yusry and I had found this frequently to be the case during our stay in Egypt. It was also the experience of many of our friends. In this respect, Saudi Arabia turned out to be not much different. For it was only when Yusry suddenly heard that the vice-director was available in his office above that we were able to take action. We hurried up to see him. He told us we could go right away to the Supreme Court, provided we called first on the *Moudir* in his office in town. We were given a letter typed on his behalf and needing only his signature to proceed. One of the *Moutawaf's* young assistants came with us, explaining that he was only too delighted to get out of his stuffy crowded office where he and a few colleagues were dealing with pilgrims' official papers, passports, and permits almost twenty-four hours a day. They would snatch a couple of hours' sleep on a mattress on the floor when they could.

The long-awaited *Moudir*, it transpired, was a youngish, high-ranking officer sitting in a pleasant air-conditioned office. He spoke to me briefly, fixing me with penetrating brown eyes.

"Do you speak English?"

"Yes."

"Are you a Muslim?"

"Of course."

He smiled then and said, "Welcome to Saudi Arabia."

Somehow these three sparse sentences seemed almost an anti-climax after our hours of waiting.

We took a taxi to the High Court of Justice, a large modern building where we were passed from official to official, guided by the *Moutawaf's* boy. Our last stop was outside a door with a guard. We were ushered in.

The spacious room was painted in quiet grays and greens. A vast Persian carpet covered the floor. At the far end was a wide semi-circular window with drawn curtains through which a little light filtered. In front of the window two men were sitting at an impressive glass-topped desk—two figures in white, their heads covered with fine white cotton *Kufeyas*. The judge who was the elder, wore his headcloth without the *Ikal*, the silk cord securing it to the head.

Yusry and I sat on chairs at the side of the room till the two men had finished discussing the pile of papers before them, the secretary noting down the judge's comments. We were summoned to sit before him. He turned wise gray eyes toward me. His face was unlined, pale. The expression in his eyes was kind, but I could imagine how they could harden toward someone in less fortunate circumstances.

The judge spoke to Yusry who translated:

"What are the Five Pillars of Islam?"

I answered, "Belief in the One God and that Muhammad is His Prophet, the five daily prayers, payment of alms, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and making the Pilgrimage." Then I was asked to recite any verses I knew from the Holy *Qur'an*. I recited the *Fatiha*, the opening chapter or *Sourah* of the Holy Book, which tradition says contains the essence of the faith in its seven

lines. The Prophet Muhammad always stressed the importance of reciting the *Fatiha* since none of the five daily prayers are acceptable without it;

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful.

Owner of the Day of Judgement,

Thee alone we worship; and Thee alone we ask for help.

Show us the straight path,

The path of those whom Thou hast favoured;

Not of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.

I also recited two other short verses. Now Yusry and I waited while the judge and his secretary conferred. How miserably inadequate I felt my Arabic then, the *Qur'anic* verses learned with painful slowness, and only memorized after several months of phonetic repetition before I acquired a significant knowledge of the language. My accent also left much to be desired. Still, any recitations from the *Qur'an* should be made in Arabic, because that is the language in which it was revealed. Indeed, it is claimed, by those whose mother tongue is Arabic, to be untranslatable.

Just then, I became aware of a shadowy form, which I guessed to be that of a young woman, standing beside me although there had been no sound of footsteps. Silently she stood before the judge who consulted a paper put in front of him by the clerk accompanying her. The judge asked if she and her husband were reconciled. From the depths of the shadowy veil came the faint sound of a word which I gathered meant yes. Dismissed, the veiled figure glided away, silently as she had come. Her interview with the judge had lasted only a couple of minutes. The clerk duly noted down the proceedings in his massive book. I began to feel a little nervous. That timid female figure in front of him had made me suddenly conscious of the absolute authority invested in the seemingly young old man in whose presence I was. In this land made safe and secure, the law is based on the *Qur'an*, the words of which, to every Muslim, are the unquestioned

words of God. Under *Qur'anic* law, punishments can be severe indeed—not intended as revenge but as a deterrent to crime. The penalty for murder is death, unless the murderer is forgiven by the family of the victim. Certain kinds of theft are punished by the cutting off of the thief's hand.

For a few moments, I was conscious of the procession of those accused of various crimes passing before the judge. How many judgments, I wondered, had those firm, pale lips pronounced? How many of those found guilty walked from that courtroom to face an agony of some kind, perhaps the fatal one?

It may be that my thoughts increased my nervousness, because, just when I imagined my catechism was over, the judge kindly pronouncing my recitations as better than he would have expected from a newcomer to the faith, the secretary leaned toward him and said, "Let us hear some more of the *Haja's* recitations from the Holy *Qur'an*." At this additional and unexpected request, I'm afraid my Arabic faltered, and to my shame I stumbled over the next verse, my husband having to prompt me.

However, the judge merely smiled and nodded benignly. Before we left, he presented me with a booklet in English on the different aspects of the *Hajj*. It was certainly with a sigh of relief I quitted that courtroom, carrying with me the treasured testimony of my faith inscribed in Arabic in my passport:

STATEMENT

We have been convinced that the bearer of this passport, Saida Sonya, has adopted the Faith correctly and she is performing the Islamic Rites and we have no objection that she carries out the Pilgrimage and visits the Prophet's Mosque accompanying her husband and under the care of the Ministry of Hajj.

SIGNED AND SEALED

With this talisman, we could now be on our way to Mecca. To celebrate the good news, we drank a Coca-Cola in company with a jovial dark-skinned fellow at the gate who told Yusry he himself had been in the legal field before enjoying retirement. It was this kind of friendly conversation with strangers that often

brought home to me the true brotherhood of Islam. We thanked our young guide and went to find some lunch in an unpretentious café, because we thought it wiser to spend little before our journey had really begun.

Back we went, then, first, to the immigration authorities to show them my official clearance, next to our *Moutawaf's* representative to pay his fee.

Large numbers of *Hujjaj* were still beside their belongings in the congested courtyard, waiting either for passports or accommodation in Jeddah, or for transportation to Mecca or relatives or friends. Everyone waited very patiently on the whole, sustained by the *Qur'anic* verse which promises, *Inna Allaha ma-as-sabreen* ("Verily, God is with the patient"). However there are limits to what certain temperaments can take, and, while we sat in the *Moutawaf's* office, a fellow-pilgrim lost his temper and raged around in a perfect fury. The reason was that his luggage had been lost, and nobody knew where it was. His every request about it had been countered with *Badain! Badain!* ("Later! Later!") Enough to make anyone lose his temper.

"God will punish you!" shouted the furious man at the helpless clerks. But then another pilgrim got up and went to the furious one and reminded him that the Prophet ("May the Peace and Blessings of God be upon him") had said that quarreling and backbiting were forbidden on the *Hajj*, the same words as stated in the *Qur'anic* verse,

The months of Pilgrimage are well known; so whoever determines to perform Pilgrimage therein there shall be no immodest speech nor abusing nor altercation on the Pilgrimage.

The divine words had a soothing effect upon the irate man, for he calmed down and went out quietly. This was the first of many times I was to see a touching readiness to accept blame and a willingness to alter his or her conduct shown by devout pilgrims on hearing an appropriate *Qur'anic* verse recited. There are multitudes all over the Muslim world who can recite most if not all of the 114 chapters of the Holy *Qur'an*, fitting the verse to the occasion when appropriate.

It was arranged with the *Moutawaf's* clerk that we were to

share a taxi to Mecca with three others, a faster and more comfortable means of transport than by bus.

When we at last got back to our room, we found that *Haja* Wadida had taken my husband's advice and gone on ahead to Mecca. It was a relief to know we were not delaying her any longer.

There was scarcely time for me to change into a fresh head veil before a porter came to fetch me. In the taxi, three Sudanese *Hujjaj* joined us. We drove off with Yusry beginning the chant, "*Labbaikallahoma labbaik!*" ("I answer, O Lord, Your call!") From the back, the two Sudanese men chimed in shyly, reading the words from a piece of paper, while we *Hajas* kept our voices very low.

We were now starting the *Omra*, the lesser Pilgrimage which is made up of fewer rites than the great one. To accomplish this, the *Haj* should preferably be wearing fresh white *Ihram* clothes. In our case, this was not practicable as thirty-six hours of sitting, walking, and sleeping in our *Ihram* had left them somewhat creased and travel-stained.

We drove at a moderate speed, for which I was thankful since some of the drivers appeared to be more keen on speed than safety in Jeddah and on the road to Mecca.

The road passed through undulating desert land with isolated patches of scrub. Shepherds were grazing their sheep and goats near the road. About halfway between Jeddah and Mecca, there was a police checkpoint and a warning written in large letters on a stone wall: FROM THIS POINT ONLY MUSLIMS ARE ALLOWED.

This is the beginning of the sacred land prohibited to non-Muslims since the Prophet Muhammad's time, in accordance with divine command. For fourteen centuries, it had scarcely felt the tread of a non-Muslim foot with the very rare exception of those traveling in disguise. These daring travelers journeyed in such fear of discovery that they pretended a religion, nationality, name, and dress not their own, because discovery would surely have meant a certain death.

Doughty, in his classic account, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, draws a frightening picture of the villainous, half-mad nomad

sheikh Salem and his crony Fheyd. Doughty was wandering as a professed Christian near the borders of the *Hejaz* when these two evil men appeared on the scene. They made his life a perfect misery, constantly threatening him with guns, knives, or sticks—in the name of religion. He was in great danger of being robbed—or worse—until, most fortunately, his life was saved by the intervention of an old servant of the powerful Sherif. But, had he been discovered inside the *Hejaz*, it is doubtful if the Sherif himself could have saved him. As it was, he reached safety a very sick man.

Now, here I was, less than a century later, entering the sacred territory in perfect safety and without the slightest fear because my passport bore the official recognition of my faith. Truly I had much to be thankful for.

Speeding in comfort along the good road between the barren rocky hills, my mind's eye saw again the stately procession of the camel caravans as they paced this way. Since leaving Jeddah, not a solitary camel had we seen. Officialdom had banished them from the main roads.

The volume of traffic going our way was increasing. With every mile, more motor transports filled the road, each bearing its load of *Hujjaj*, till, nearing Mecca, it swelled to a flood of lorries, buses, vans, private cars, and taxis. Lorries and buses sped past, crammed with white-clad pilgrims. Faces were jubilant, for this was the joyful end of their journey, made as a sacred duty and also as a declaration of faith. Faces were alight with faith and happiness, and everyone chanted, as he rode, Abraham's age-old cry, "*Labbaikallahoma labbaik!*" ("Here I come in answer to Thee O Lord!") I had the feeling that a mighty wave was bearing us all along like the foam at its crest, to surge to the foot of the walls of the *Haram*. All we *Hujjaj* were one, journeying together for the love of God.

The desert changed to low green hills growing larger as we sped along. Isolated houses appeared with flat roofs and small shuttered windows. I glimpsed ornate, modern villas standing in princely solitude. The buildings grew denser and taller. Expensive-looking apartment blocks challenged the eye, rising above

the older more interesting houses with their secret shuttered windows.

The traffic became more congested; dusty red buses, gaily painted lorries, neat, decorated Toyota and Datsun pick-up vans all loaded with joyously chanting *Hujjaj*. The road ran upward, then dipped down. And suddenly there it stood. The mosque beloved by all faithful hearts, the *Haram*, its towering gray and white minarets piercing the sky, the *Haram*, containing the *Kaabah*, the "House of God," for one thousand four hundred years the dreamed-of treasure of the spirit which forms the meeting point for the world's community of Muslims.

III

"The House of God" ... The Haram of Abraham

And when Abraham said "My Lord make this city secure and save my sons from worshipping idols."

[The Qur'an]

The taxi, having first dropped off our Sudanese fellow-pilgrims, drew up at a narrow side turning. Yemeni porters took over our baggage. We walked a short way between tall old houses whose owners sat by their doors. One or two street vendors displayed trays of assorted goods resting on the ground. The porters turned in at a narrow door flanked by two slender green pillars, beside which, on the typical high bench lined with carpeting we had seen in Jeddah, a man was lounging. This was our *Moutawaf*, in whose house we would be staying during our time in Mecca. *Haj* Thakafy stood up, a smile on his finely chiselled features as he welcomed us. We went in and climbed several flights of steep old stairs, glimpsing shadowed rooms from the landings, until we reached a small room under the rafters. The walls were pale blue, the ceiling of wood.

Facing us, reclining rather like a Matisse odalisque in a long, flowered dress, was a large, moon-faced woman, smoking a hubble-bubble of ornate design. As the occupant of the single bed, who was every inch the person in authority, rose to greet us, I was aware of a circle of white-clad *Hajas* sitting around the room, on the floor, incongruously putting me in mind of ladies-in-waiting around their queen.

"Ahlan wasahlan! Ahlan wasahlan!" ("Welcome! Welcome!")

The moon-faced one boomed out the traditional welcome of the Arab world which actually means, "We are your family and you are now in a valley (where there is protection and abundance)," thereby showing the richness of meaning in certain Arabic phrases.

I shook hands all around, and the lady of the house (I learned later she was the mother-in-law of our *Moutawaf* and the undisputed authority above stairs) said she hoped I would be happy with her. I suspect that, had my stay with the "Turkish Tyrant" (as I privately dubbed her) been during our second Pilgrimage, I would have been happier, because by then I knew better what to expect and I knew also that none of the little incidents of communal living should be taken seriously. As it was, the combination of my ignorance of the language, living in a confined space with a roomful of ladies whom I did not know, having to share one small washroom, and feeling myself to be constantly under a kind of invisible restraint from the Turkish Tyrant's somewhat overpowering rule meant I was living under a considerable strain at first. The fact that the lady was rather given to shouting when put out did not help matters, and naturally in my ignorance I made mistakes.

It was not until we had exchanged these pleasantries that I realized we would all be living together, about twelve *Hajas* crammed into one little room. As it happens, it is almost impossible not to have crowded living conditions while on the *Haj*, and more recently returned pilgrims have described houses so full as to necessitate *Hujjaj* sleeping in the washrooms at times. At least our rooms were clean, and the washrooms were sluiced down every day. But it does take a little time to become adjusted.

While the *Hajas* had been getting acquainted, Yusry, who had been hovering in the background making sure all was well with me, went downstairs to see about his own accommodations. We had arranged to meet outside the front door when we had carried out the ritual washing prescribed before beginning the sacred rites and before the prayers.

Following the Prophet's example, having declared the intention to carry out the ritual ablution, the hands are first rinsed

three times. Next the mouth is rinsed three times; then the nostrils are rinsed. The face is now bathed thrice, then the right and left forearm bathed up to the elbow the same number of times. Then the wet hands are drawn over the head, and the ears and neck rinsed once. Finally, the right then the left foot is bathed.

If possible, it is best to take a bath before entering Mecca to begin the rites.

As Yusry and I set out for the *Haram*, I was full of excitement and expectation. The streets were alive with pilgrims hurrying, like us, to the *Haram*, or coming away from it, or just arriving.

Now we were being swept along with the stream of pilgrims converging from the narrow side streets of tall old houses, a white-clad tide of humanity all intent on a spiritual aim. Borne along with the tide, I felt within me the sensation of lightness that comes when one's whole being is concentrated on a religious action, as if the body hardly existed.

There are twenty-four gates into the *Haram*, of which the four main doors are flanked by towering minarets of gray and white marble. Everyone entering pauses to remove his or her shoes, so only the freshly bathed feet will touch the marble floors.

There is a prayer the pilgrim can say on entering the *Haram*:

*O God, Thou art Peace,
from Thee Peace—and to Thee
returneth Peace.
Greet us, our Lord,
with Peace.
And accept us in Thy Paradise,
the Mansion of Peace.
Thou art Glorious and Most High!
To Thee belongeth Greatness and Honour!*

We were now about to begin the *Omra*, or lesser Pilgrimage, the rites of which consist of circling the *Kaabah* seven times and then walking between the nearby hillocks (called *Safa* and

Marwah) seven times. The greater Pilgrimage also begins with these rites but includes additional ones.

Once inside the *Haram*, the Pilgrim sees stretching before his eyes the vast panorama of the interior of a mosque immense enough to hold half a million worshippers, perhaps more. The colonnaded walls are punctuated by tall, graceful minarets soaring high above the courtyard which is open to the sky. At prayer times, courtyard and balconies fill to overflowing with every member of the congregation facing toward the *Kaabah* at the center. At other times, a river of *Hujjaj* is ever-moving, flowing to, from, and around the courtyard of the *Haram*. At all times of the day and night except when taking part in the prayers, rivulets of this pilgrim flood flow toward the center of the mosque to eddy like a whirlpool around the black-robed *Kaabah* standing at the *Haram's* heart.

The name *Haram* means both forbidden to disbelievers and sacred to believers. It is held that the original stone for building the *Kaabah* came from heaven and was brought by the angel Gabriel to Abraham, one of the earliest prophets. It was Abraham who was the first example of obedience to the one God, the Arabic word for which state is Islam. With his son Ishmail, Abraham built the *Kaabah*. When it was completed, God ordered Abraham to proclaim annual Pilgrimage to the "House of God" for all the faithful. This became a tradition for all Arab peoples.

With the passage of time, however, the purity of the faith became polluted by baser concepts. Primitive minds revered their leaders and holy men to the extent of symbolizing them in statues of wood and stone. These statues, set up in and around the *Kaabah* and in private homes later came to be worshipped as gods until that triumphant day when the Prophet Muhammad strode into the *Kaabah* to smash every idol in the name of the one God.

Today, nothing remains of the original *Kaabah* except for the sacred Black Stone, which has been incorporated into successive rebuildings. Set in an oval silver frame, the Black Stone rests imbedded in the southeast corner of the *Kaabah*. Western com-

mentators claim it is of meteoric origin, coming from outer space, which would seem to support the legend connected with it. Whatever its origin, the Black Stone is for millions of the faithful the precious talisman which they believe will bring blessings on whoever touches it. However, Omar, the second Caliph after the death of the Prophet, said when he first kissed the stone, "I know you are only a stone that brings neither good nor harm but I saw the Prophet kiss you so I do the same."

The Black Stone is held dear by every pilgrim because it is believed to have been first set in place by Abraham's own hands and because the Prophet himself kissed it while on Pilgrimage, enjoining his followers to do the same for the sake of its blessed associations.

When first the pilgrim sees the *Kaabah*, the focus of his prayers and dreams, he is often moved to tears or will stand motionless, gazing in a daze of joy. When the time comes to leave, he can hardly bear to go. And so it was with us two standing there. The *Kaabah* tugs at the heart because it is truly the place most honored by God in Islam.

Built of dark gray stone, and rectangular in shape, its longest sides measure about forty feet, and its height is about forty-five feet. The gold and silver door is set about two yards above ground and a special movable railed staircase is kept nearby for the rare occasions when the door is opened. The *Kaabah* is yearly dressed in a new black silk robe banded at about a third of the distance from the top with golden embroidered lettering from the *Qur'an*.

Yusry and I stood for several moments gazing at the lovely scene. Around the *Kaabah*, marble paving is laid and beyond this lies a graveled area traversed by marble pathways radiating from the center. On the far side of this expanse, beneath the broad roof supported by hundreds of pale blue, green, and gold columns, were gathered thousands upon thousands of the faithful. Some were praying, some sitting reading or reciting from the *Qur'an*, some, meditating; others were stretched asleep on the carpets or the marble.

Overhead swooped flocks of pigeons flying to perches under

the roof or alighting to walk unafraid among the multitude. The pigeons of Mecca and Medina are safe from harm because of a legend connected with the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina, when life under the idolators' persecution had become impossible.

Muhammad and his devoted friend Abu Bakr had taken refuge in a cave in the mountainside when their pursuers appeared to be getting too close. A party of Meccans actually reached the cave, but in the meantime a spider had spun a web across the entrance and a pair of doves were peacefully nesting there. Catching sight of the newly spun web and the nesting birds, the pursuers concluded no one could be hiding in the cave, and Muhammad must be far away.

For centuries since, pilgrims have brought grain to feed the pigeons for the sake of their two predecessors who helped save the Prophet's life.

During this rite called the *Tawaf*, certain prescribed prayers can be recited, each circling starting with the phrase, "*Bismillah Allahou Akbar*" ("In the Name of God, God is Most Great.") The prayers are various and not set in any obligatory form. Indeed, the pilgrim may say almost any prayer he or she likes; he can repeat continuously, "*Sobhanaallah walhamdoulillah wa la ilaha illallah wallahou Akbar!*" ("Glory to God and Praise be to God and there is no god but God and God is Most Great!")

As we stood waiting for a moment before entering the moving circle, I felt overwhelmed by it all—the place, the event in which we were taking part, the multitudes of worshippers. I was overwhelmed also by the emotionally charged atmosphere and by the unearthly beauty of the scene. Such radiance lit the faces of that rapt company. Eyes were shining with the joy of a lifelong dream fulfilled, fervent voices recited prayers rapturously—pilgrims who did not know these by heart carried small books from which they read aloud. Others were led by their *Moutawaf* guides, repeating the prayers after them in chorus. Ardent feet carried the faithful ever forward and around the *Kaabah*, heedless of the turbulence in the flood.

In that most sacred place I felt myself losing my identity, my

spirit becoming merged in the spiritual depths all around me. Everyone was rejoicing together to have been granted the strength and the opportunity to reach Mecca and to enter the *Haram*.

My heart was filled with thankfulness to God for this, the crown of His blessings, the chance to carry out the Pilgrimage together with my husband.

The crush was tremendous, especially near the Black Stone toward which the faithful pressed with all their might in order to kiss or touch it. Near it, set high up in the wall, is the gold and silver door of the *Kaabah*, seldom opened except to admit the king and his entourage, who come once a year to wash the floor with rosewater. I was informed the interior is quite empty but for the name of God inscribed on each wall, which is hung with rose-pink silk and has a carpet on the floor.

On the ledge beside the door, a guard sits, brandishing a stick to ward off those who try to climb up to be near the door. Another guard is stationed on the ledge below the Black Stone. Clinging to a rope hanging from the *Kaabah* drapery, he uses the rope's end to tap any of the faithful who remain with lips pressed to the Black Stone for so long that others are prevented from approaching it. For many of the ardent who now find their most cherished dreams being fulfilled can hardly bear to take their lips away. They may have to struggle fiercely to reach it and fiercely they claim their right to cling to it, the stone hallowed by Abraham and by the Prophet Muhammad.

We had been standing just beyond the moving circle. Now the time had come for us to begin our first circumambulation. I clung to Yusry's arm even tighter as we edged into the human current. Now we were to become part of the pilgrim whirlpool tossing up white and brown waves against the Black Stone and the gold and silver door. All around us was the measured bare-foot tread, fast or slow, of fellow-pilgrims making their seven circuits and steadily intoning, "*Sobhanallah wal Hamdoulillah wa la Ilaha Illallah wa Allahou Akbar!*" ("Glory to God and Praise be to God and there is no god but God and God is Most Great.") Some pilgrims were weeping with joy. A few poor souls were blind—led by companions blessed with sight. Beyond the

periphery of the whirlpool eddying round the *Kaabah* circled bearers working in couples, stretchers borne between them on which were carried those *Hujjaj* who were either too old or infirm to perform the rites on foot. The bearers moved at a jog-trot, the jutting poles of their stretchers and their loud cries clearing a way ahead. Lost to the world in their absorption with their prayers, the isolated aged and infirm figures sat motionless on their stretchers, only their lips moving in prayer, hands grasping the stretcher poles.

"Glory to God and Praise be to God and there is no god but God and God is Most Great!" As we walked, we repeated the prayer in time with our footsteps. Each time we came opposite the Black Stone, we followed the tradition of pointing at it with our right hands and reciting "*Bismillah Allahou Akbar!*" ("In the Name of God, God is Most Great!") It was impossible to struggle close enough to touch it. Now and again, we were violently pushed aside by lines of little Bedouins darting through the crowd or by groups of burly African *Hujjaj* looking neither to left nor right. But when everyone is so intent on fulfilling his or her religious duty, there is little time to consider others. During the *Hajj*, one has even in the midst of prayers to be prepared for an inadvertent push from a fellow-pilgrim who may find himself too hemmed in to say his own prayers.

My feet were carrying me around the *Kaabah*, but I was so overcome by the whole experience I soon lost count even of the few circuits we had yet to make. I was grateful that Yusry's arm was like a rock supporting me. His steady voice repeating the prayers calmed me until I could join him in reciting those I knew.

When we had completed the seventh circuit, we emerged to a calmer spot beyond the moving circle. Here we prayed the two *Rakaahs* recommended by the Prophet. (A *Rakaah* is a ritual bowing which is part of the regular Muslim prayer.) This spot was near the place where it is believed Abraham used to stand.

Adjoining the *Kaabah's* north side and within the area circled by the faithful is a low semicircular wall enclosing an expanse of marble paving. Here many go to pray because it was once a part of the *Kaabah* before it was rebuilt. Another reason for

its being held in reverence is the belief that under the marble paving sleep the prophet Ishmail and his mother, Hagar.

We had now completed the first of the rites that serve to unite the world's brotherhood of Muslims.

Joining in the sacred rites and walking to the places where they are carried out, an awareness was with me—an awareness of those countless millions of others, past, present, and to come, flowing in an immeasurable annual tide down through time.

Next we looked for the sacred well of *Zemzem* which is now housed in a large underground room approached by a flight of broad stone steps divided into two parts for men and women. All *Hujjaj* visit the well frequently during their stay in Mecca, not only to drink its pleasant-tasting water but also to fill the variety of receptacles they carry, to pour the water over themselves and even to soak the shrouds brought by some of them from home. We were to see these lengths of white cotton drying in the sun on the upper balconies of the *Haram*.

The water flows through several taps which of course are insufficient to supply everyone waiting at the same time. Consequently a large and eager gathering is constantly collecting to get to the taps. At the top of the steps, men and boys sell *Zemzem* water, at varying prices, from earthenware vessels, buckets—any kind of receptacle. Some hand the water, free, from chased silvery bowls of charming design. By this time, Yusry and I were too tired to struggle through the crowds to the taps, so we bought a drink from one of the water sellers. The water tasted delicious, sparkling, and slightly mineral, even a little like coconut milk.

The Prophet himself is quoted as saying that the best water on Earth is *Zemzem* water, because it gives satisfaction as a drink both appetizing and nutritious, and is also a cure for some ailments. The *Haj* is eager to drink it and often to carry it home in containers of various shapes and sizes as a precious gift.

The next rite to be completed after the circling is the walking, the *Saie*, between the two low rocky "hills" called Safa and Marwah. Again, this is the handing down of an ancient tradition dating from the time of Abraham, and like the sevenfold circum-

ambulation it has been incorporated by the Prophet at the command of God into the solemn acts of the *Hajj*.

The walking between Safa and Marwah is done in commemoration of another earlier walk when Hagar, Abraham's wife, found herself alone in that then desolate place with her little son Ishmail. It was hot and she grew terribly thirsty. Hagar knew she must find water although there was nothing but barren, stony desert all around her. She put the child down and began to walk back and forth between the two rocky hills, looking about her all the time for any sign of water. She climbed to the hilltops in the hope of seeing an oasis or passing caravan. Growing more and more anxious and praying constantly, her walk quickened to a run as she hurried up and down in her desperate search. By the seventh time Hagar must surely have been exhausted and paused to rest. All at once she heard Ishmail crying. Turning toward her son she was amazed and overjoyed to see a spring of water gushing up near him.

That same spring is the sacred *Zemzem* which has ever since supplied pilgrims with abundant water. Dating from that miraculous occasion the faithful have shared in Hagar's sevenfold walking while fervently praying to God. (Between two points along the marble corridor, marked by green pillars and lights, the men are required to "hasten" while the women walk.)

With the passage of untold centuries and countless millions of feet Safa and Marwah have dwindled to rocky promontories. The distance between them is roughly a quarter of a mile, so the seven walkings total about two miles. The whole immense area is now enclosed by roof and marble walls and forms part of the *Haram*. The *Hujjaj* walk or run in the same direction up one side of this vast corridor and down the other. Along its center runs a narrow alley between brass railings, reserved for the wheelchairs of those too aged or infirm to manage the two-mile walk, in the care of attendants.

Yusry and I stood on Safa's rocky slope and declared our intention to carry out the *Saie*.

Walking in the midst of the ardent brotherhood my husband

and I recited our prayers together, praising God, and on reaching each hill we paused to say special prayers aloud, hands uplifted in the direction of the *Kaabah*.

It was an amazing, an awe-inspiring sight.

The strong feeling that this could be the nearest sight on Earth, to what the Last Day might look like, was with me as I gazed at the white-clad multitude moving over that vast expanse. Thousands and thousands of pilgrims were there, walking and running up and down the immensely long, high-ceilinged corridor and climbing the far-distant hillside. The sound of their voices was like the roar of the sea as they recited prayers of praise and supplication to God.

Up and down the central alley moved the wheelchairs of the infirm. One wheelchair held three children strapped together; in others sat pilgrims whose aged or sick faces were lit up, rapt, as they murmured prayers with hands outstretched in supplication. Not all the aged and infirm asked to be carried; we passed very many elderly or ailing pilgrims walking slowly and determinedly by themselves.

Muslims believe that the pilgrim who undertakes the *Hajj* correctly, will have all his or her sins erased and will be once more innocent as a newborn babe before God. Therefore, to undertake this duty when near the end of life—even to die in so doing—will earn for the *Hajj* or *Haja* all the joys of paradise.

Toward the end of the walking I must admit I was mentally and physically overwrought. Stronger currents, wilder elements, in the flood would thrust one abruptly aside. Glancing at Yusry I was moved to see him quite carried away with emotion, tears streaming down his cheeks. Pilgrimage is naturally a time of heightened emotions, of moments of supreme spiritual exaltation. For myself, it was particularly during those periods of calm after the tumult had passed, that my soul would become most fully aware of the immanence of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Then the sense of awe and wonder, the deep spiritual significance of Pilgrimage and the intensified perception of the timeless beauty all around me would together combine to overwhelm my heart in tears.

On completion of the seventh walking the Pilgrim has a lock of hair cut to show his or her submission to God. This marks the conclusion of the rites of *Omra*, the lesser Pilgrimage.

The *Haj* or *Haja* may now change into everyday clothes, and women may use cosmetics and perfume again, while married couples can resume normal relations.

At last, tired but happy we made our way back and climbed the stairs to our respective rooms.

All the *Hajas* were eager to know if I had made the seven circlings and the seven walkings and expressed their thankfulness to God for my being able to do so. Some of my sisters had of course completed these first rites already. We could now compare notes; was *Haja* Saida able to kiss the Black Stone despite the packed throng around it? Could *Haja* Nefisa reach the taps of *Zemzem* through the crowds? Was the *Saie* easy to carry out? By the end of our discussion it was quite late. Every *Haja* lay down on her humble bed on the floor, content in the knowledge that she had completed this first solemn ceremony in obedience to God's command.

IV

Life in the Hareem

Treat your wives with kindness and love. Verily you have taken them on the security of God. . . .

[From the Prophet's last sermon delivered at Mount Arafat]

Worn out after the tremendous experience of the previous day, I slept like a log. I woke to the twittering of the *Hajas* round me as they rolled up their slender mattresses and folded the cotton coverlets to be stacked neatly in a corner of the roof which, like most Middle Eastern roofs, was flat. The Turkish Tyrant was reclining on her bed supervising the tidying-up operations in stentorian tones. Noticing the newcomer was awake, she invited me to sit beside her. Our conversation began by being quite cordial. In a moment or two, however, it became apparent that her remarks were not fully understood and her questions not adequately answered. By degrees, the moon face took on a crimson hue, the voice rose to a bellow. No doubt, like thoughtless people the world over, the Turkish Tyrant imagined she would make herself understood by shouting! In vain, a kindly *Haja* pointed out that I was English and therefore did not understand everything the *Sitt Haja* (the lady of the house) said. The crimson face merely grew darker.

At this awkward moment, to my relief, a diversion was provided by the formidable lady's grandchildren, who started to squabble in a corner. Upon these two young heads, the infuriated roar was now turned. Subsequently I discovered that, as soon as she sensed any potential opposition was about to collapse, the roar would change, rather like that of a tigress after

a meal, to a kind of cajoling sing-song, the volume of which still tended to drown any other conversation. I do not know whether it was because of the sheer force of her personality or something else, but it seemed to be only when the Turkish Tyrant was asleep, rosy moon face covered by a handkerchief, that the conversation of the circle of *Hajas* became louder than pianissimo.

Amusingly, even when the *Sitt Haja* meant to be kind, she was alarming. Once, just as she was about to commence saying the noon prayer, she noticed I was sitting with my back against the wall. She had been standing quite still in preparation for the prayer when suddenly she let out a yell: "O *Haja Saida*! Why don't you use a cushion!" I almost jumped out of my skin.

The Turkish Tyrant's daughter, Ameera, had a much gentler nature. Slim and small boned, she moved with an easy seductive grace. Her small head with its delicate features and long, heavy-lidded eyes had something of the enchanting Queen Nefertiti about it. In fact, mother and daughter were Cairenes, the mother flying every Pilgrimage season to Saudi Arabia to help look after their *Hujjaj* guests.

Of course, in their position of authority and knowing considerably more than many pilgrims about the rites, the two ladies in whose care we *Hajas* were felt they should advise us on correctness of dress and conduct. They were quite right to do so, my only reservation being the, to me, unnerving manner in which the advice was given!

I suppose the storybook idea of the *Hareem* is still held by many in the West, perpetuated by the novels and films which show a roomful of glamorous girls lolling around among the cushions with nothing to do but await the pleasure of their master the sultan. But this is far from the picture awakening Saudi Arabian womanhood would want to represent them today. In fact, to keep pace with the rapid rate of growth in the fields of education and school and hospital-building alone, an ever-increasing number of girls, as well as boys, are training to be teachers, doctors and nurses. No doubt, as time goes on, the number of professions open to girls will increase also. Hosts of Saudi students are now studying abroad; there are at present

several hundred in Egypt, girls as well as boys, studying various subjects including medicine and journalism.

However, the number of such progressive young women is still relatively small compared to other Arab countries. For the present, it would seem the majority of girls continue to hold marriage as the ultimate aim in life, in compliance with the deeply rooted traditional attitudes of the country.

One aspect of the *Hareem* Westerners find intriguing is the Muslim household in which the husband is married to two, three, or, at most, four wives. While it might be difficult to imagine such an arrangement ever resulting in happiness, it can work very well!

An Egyptian schoolteacher friend described one such household where she was a frequent guest during her six-year stay in Riyadh. There were four wives, each having her own apartment. They all got on very well together and had worked out an amicable system whereby the daily chores were shared. Taking it in turns, each of the wives took on all the washing, cooking, or minding the children for a week.

However, it would need to be a very well-off husband, not to mention a brave one, to take on four wives! There is, in fact, a *Qur'anic* stipulation stating that a man should marry only one wife unless he is confident he can treat more than one with equal justice. Islamic teaching, in fact, emphasizes the mutually complementary roles of husband and wife. The husband is told to protect, maintain and cherish his wife. She, in turn, is told to respect, care for and cherish her husband. Each partner is held responsible before God, the husband for supporting the household, the wife for care of children and home. The wife is expected to obey her husband in what is right and he must always treat her with kindness. Their ideal mutual interdependence is beautifully described in the *Qur'an*; *They are apparel for you and you are apparel for them and He put between you love and compassion.*

In the unhappy event of the marriage breaking down the *Qur'an* urges relatives to do their best to try to bring about a reconciliation. Divorce should only be resorted to if all else fails, and after sufficient time has been allowed to think carefully first.

Western critics of the Muslim way of life are always quick to point out the high rate of divorce, the threat of which they claim hangs like a sword over the heads of married women. While it is doubtless true a divorced Muslim wife would find it more difficult to remarry because of the social stigma in many communities one wonders if the rate of divorce is as high proportionately as in, say, North America. The difficulty for the divorced Muslim wife, unless she moves in more progressive circles, is unfortunately the humiliation still attached to that state. If she has no choice but to return to her father's house, her position may be rather miserable.

On this subject, the Prophet had some strong advice to give:

"Of all things which have been permitted divorce is the most hated by Allah," he warned his followers.

Living their usually quiet and secluded lives, most *Hareem* in the cities of Saudi Arabia look forward to entertaining, visiting, and parties as their main diversions. Preparations for these occasions can be extensive, both on the part of the hostess and the guest. In the households in which I lived for a while, the preparation of food took several hours. Our landladies in Mecca and Medina used to send their young boy servants out to do the morning shopping, although one up-to-date Medina landlady ordered her groceries by telephone.

Probably because they lead such secluded lives and habitually cover themselves in black when leaving the house, Saudi women, or at any rate those I encountered or saw in Mecca, Medina, Jeddah, and later in Riyadh, love very bright colors and bold patterns in their long dresses. A party dress may be made of a glamorous imported material elaborately patterned and sewn with sequins or tiny colored-glass beads, giving a very rich effect.

I remember my first social visit to a Saudi home. One morning in Mecca, my husband had met Hassan, an assistant of Haj Thakafy's, and he had invited us to his home for tea. Hassan and his pretty, soft-eyed wife were of Indian parentage but had lived all their lives in Mecca. Their apartment, one of the smallest I have ever seen, was close to the *Haram* and so conveniently placed for Hassan to attend the daily prayers. We went first into

their sitting room, neat as a doll's house. It was like being in a room full of flowers; floral carpeting on floor and ottoman running round three of the walls, which were also decorated with flowery rugs. Hassan led me to his wife who was sitting with a friend in an even tinier room. The friend, a young Saudi girl sat in the cushioned windowseat. A large refrigerator stood by the door, while shelves and table were loaded with miscellaneous objects, the most conspicuous being a large tin lettered with the good advice:

"Be to her virtues very kind; be to her faults a little blind."

Feminine underwear and a long black veil hung from a hook by the window. My hostess and her friend were both wearing long-sleeved dresses, tight at the waist and full-skirted below. Over coffee and a plate of nuts, we chatted about subjects dear to most women, children, clothes, and holidays abroad. Hassan's wife told me they had holidayed in Alexandria. What a contrast, I thought to myself, for a Saudi woman to be able to go out in the open air unveiled. Wouldn't it, I wondered, be difficult to get used to wearing a veil again? While in Alexandria, Hassan had studio portraits made of them posing together. Proudly she showed us several huge enlargements.

It was time to go. Hassan and Yusry called to me from the other room, "O *Haja Said*a! Come now, the prayer will be due soon!"

Another Arabian household remains vividly in my mind; during a separate visit to Medina, Yusry had been approached on arrival by a man who described an ideal house nearby in which the landlady had a couple of vacant rooms. "Let's go and look at them," I suggested. Yusry went first and returned with an enthusiastic report. He led me up a narrow side street where ancient houses leaned toward each other like old friends exchanging secrets. Around the corner, in a street straight out of the Arabian Nights, stood a house with a green ironwork door. A few little heaps of tea leaves and watermelon rind lying on the ground, having been tossed out of the windows, confirmed the impression one had of stepping back into the Middle Ages. We slipped past the heavy door and along a narrow dimly lit cor-

ridor. At its end, a right turn led to a flight of the steepest stone stairs I have ever encountered, large blocks seemingly fashioned for giants and needing giant strides. Deep window embrasures were a help, since, by grasping their edges one could get extra leverage. From the small landings I glimpsed bare rooms for *Hujjaj* with matting and blankets laid out. A last heave, and we reached the top landing where our landlady was waiting to greet us. She was a lively dark-eyed woman, still quite young.

"Please come in," she smiled and held aside a curtain veiling a doorway. Removing our shoes, we stepped inside. I blinked at the vision of sumptuousness now revealed in contrast to the bare floors with thin pallets stretched on matting to which we had become accustomed. This was our landlady's private room, which she was willing to let for two people because she had another room for her own use. A rich Persian carpet covered the floor from wall to wall, and against it were set bolsters and cushions decorated with colorful peacock motifs. Rugs like small tapestries had been hung to cover most of the walls. Curiously, almost all the rugs repeated the same theme, a female Spanish dancer improbably dancing on a fringed rug and surrounded by an admiring audience. Four rugs repeated this theme, while two showed it in reverse! A last rug depicted two slightly surprised-looking and elderly lions. What small amount of space remained was filled with a glassed-in niche containing wax flowers in shining vases gaudy with gold, and, by framed portraits of King Feisal, the head of the house, and their son. The whole effect was charmingly unselfconscious, and we settled to rent the room for a few days.

Our Medina landlady, whose name was Suad, was the owner of many up-to-date amenities; fluorescent lighting, an electric fan, a large Frigidaire, an air conditioner, and a handsome caramel-colored gas range complete with a see-through oven door adorned her large kitchen.

However, the house was an old one, and, therefore, it had "facilities" of the primitive type though scrubbed scrupulously clean. In the washroom stood a vast zinc barrel which was filled daily with the household supply of water. One washed in a basin,

sitting on a low wooden stool. Later, to my horror, I discovered the washroom became a playground for cockroaches at night. I know them to be harmless creatures, although they are somewhat unclean, but they have always held for me a nightmare quality and given rise to an irrational fear. The presence on our threshold of two miniature processions of ants scurrying fast in opposite directions never troubled me at all.

Suad had several children, including a young baby, so she was kept busy all day long, frequently directing operations at the top of her voice. One afternoon I found her lying fast asleep on the floor outside her kitchen where she must have sunk down, exhausted from all the sweeping, scrubbing, washing, and preparing of food. Her eldest daughter, Salwa, a bright girl of about seventeen, was, it seemed, keen on learning English. One evening when I was sitting alone, there was a knock at the door, and in stepped Salwa carrying a tray loaded with a large carafe of coffee and the prettiest tiny porcelain cups. She had worked out that the best way to approach the English *Haja* for a little English conversation was to start off with a cup of coffee. Salwa fetched her copy books, and we spent a pleasant hour or two trying out our English and Arabic on each other.

Apart from the strong feeling of the past pervading certain areas of Mecca and Medina, time there seems to slow down and life become a less hurried affair. This is partly because the passage of time is marked by the hours of prayer called five times daily instead of the chiming of clocks every hour. Appointments are made with reference to the prayers so as to take place either before or after them. No one likes to arrive late for the prayers if he can help it, so latecomers dash through the streets to the mosques, prayer rugs slung over shoulders.

In the Prophet's day, women used to attend prayers regularly in the mosque, but, when he considered they might be attracting masculine attention by praying publicly (though not of course intending to do so), the Prophet advised women to pray in the privacy of their own homes. Consequently, the majority of women pray at home today, although, during the *Hajj*, they are recommended to join in all the congregational prayers. Then men

and women are divided into separate sections as a rule, but under extremely crowded conditions this is not practicable and they perform their devotions side by side.

One evening Yusry had arranged to meet me after *Maghreb*, the sunset prayer, in the Prophet's Mosque. Suad, Selwa, and I were hurrying to get ready. We rapidly carried out the ritual washing, then carefully covered our hair and put on our long dresses, with Suad urging us to be quick. As we three *Hareem* descended the stairs, long skirts brushing the stone steps, veils being lowered by my companions in their black *Abayas*, I had the oddest feeling of being plunged back into the past, a feeling enhanced when we stepped into the dimly lit street.

The circumstances of our stay in Medina were of course very different from those of our stay in Mecca during the *Hajj*. For one thing, the luxurious room had been rented to us off the Pilgrimage season, while Yusry and I were on the *Omra*, or lesser Pilgrimage. Off season, the great crowds are absent, and life is more peaceful.

In *Haj* Thakafy's house, every corner was occupied, the house alive with voices and movement.

On the upper floor, we of the Egyptian *Hareem* were settling down more comfortably together. Our number included two elderly *Hajas*, one of whom found walking an effort because of her bad legs but, nevertheless, she bravely carried on for as long as she could. Most of the group were mothers or grandmothers; several, sad to say, were widows. However, there were two very young *Hajas*, one recently married, whose husband was sharing a room below with other men. The two youngest naturally preferred sitting together, with Ameera's schoolgirl daughter making a third and enjoying a few jokes while the rest of us chatted more sedately. At breakfast time, Ameera would join us, and, after the main meal of the day, she again made part of the circle. Ameera would sit gracefully on the carpet cross-legged, pouring the tea, a liquid amber without milk, into tiny glasses kept polished crystal clear. She always found a second glass for me, a gesture that rather touched me as if she realized the comfort it brought the strange English *Haja*. Then the Turkish Tyrant

would call for her *Shisha* and puff away merrily until the charcoal embers glowed and the water bubbled, making a cheerful background noise for the conversation.

When annoyed, the Tyrant would roar at Ameera, too, but she took the fortissimo tongue-lashing in the traditional way of the Oriental woman, silently and with eyes downcast, unlike her own daughter who generally answered back, then sulked when scolded.

Like most families, this one had its undercurrents beneath the surface. Late one night I was awakened by the sound of sobbing. Around me were the indistinct motionless forms of the sleeping *Hajas*. Then in the gloom I made out a crouching figure. It was Ameera crying bitterly. The sobbing went on until she heard her husband's voice from the door, "There, there, my darling. Come along," and he held out his hand to her. Like a child who is unhappy, she went to him. Lying in the darkness I wondered why Ameera had been crying. Not for the first time it occurred to me the mistress of the house might be finding the demands made by her *Hujjaj* guests, plus the occasionally strained relationship with her mother, emotionally taxing.

However, scarcely had Ameera's sobs died away when it appeared someone else was in tears. From the next room came the noise of much louder sobbing, and in a moment I realized it was Ameera's formidable mother crying, incoherent words coming in snatches through the open door. One could only conjecture that unkind words had been said, wounding even the forbidding Tyrant so much, she could do nothing but dissolve in tears.

Oh well, I comforted myself, no doubt *Haj* Thakafy as master of the house was fully experienced in coping with the ups and downs of the *Hareem* members of his family.

So much had happened since Yusry and I had arrived in Mecca, we had almost forgotten about poor *Haja* Wadida. Now we began to be concerned as to what had happened to delay her so long. We decided she had most likely met up with a friend or acquaintance who had recommended another *Moutawaf*. But, on the day after our arrival, a porter brought up a familiar-looking

suitcase, and a few minutes later it was followed by a white-clad figure. It was *Haja* Wadida. Poor lady, she was in a state of exhaustion and bewilderment. I felt a stab of guilt and compunction at having let her go ahead on her own when I ought to have realized she really had need of a man's care and protection. We should have persuaded her to wait for us in Jeddah. Now she guessed the commanding matron sitting on the bed to be the lady of the house, and, uttering plaintive little cries, she took a few tottering steps and collapsed on that lady's bosom. Between sobs, she then told her story; it seemed two young acquaintances had recommended a *Moutawaf* at whose house she had spent the night. Probably not being prepared for the fact that the *Hajj* means crowded and frequently noisy living conditions, she had been unable to sleep a wink. Luckily she had remembered to keep the slip of paper on which Yusry had scribbled *Haj* Thakafy's name.

At the end of *Haja* Wadida's tale of woe, the Tyrant showed us she was fundamentally kindhearted by vacating her bed for the tired-out new arrival who lay back gratefully, a handkerchief spread over her face, to sleep like the dead for the next ten hours or so.

Haja Wadida woke much refreshed and prepared to go to the *Haram* to perform the lesser Pilgrimage. Because the walking involved would have been too much for her, she hired attendants to carry her sitting in a stretcher and to push her wheelchair.

But, even when carried throughout the rites, the emotions would still be keyed up to the highest pitch. Although, freed from the physical battling with great crowds, the pilgrim is able to concentrate wholly on his or her spiritual duties and to offer up fervent prayers, these intense devotional thoughts, combined with all the excitement, can leave a person not physically strong to begin with, quite drained of energy. So it was not surprising *Haja* Wadida came back a few hours later in an exhausted state.

Seeing her about to collapse, again the Tyrant, who by now appeared a good deal less tyrannical in my estimation, obligingly vacated her bed a second time, until her guest had revived sufficiently to be able to take a little light refreshment. The Tyrant

was perhaps a shade unsympathetic when she boomed, "After all, O *Haja* Wadida! This is the Pilgrimage!" implying that a certain degree of hardship and fatigue is inevitable.

Although the *Hareem* on the top floor were Egyptian, with the exception of myself, the lower floors were tenanted by pilgrims of different nationalities, Arabian, Egyptian, African, Syrian and others. Immediately below us were two rooms, the first occupied by my husband and other men, the second by African families. Different colors, different backgrounds, different languages, yet all were living in harmony.

Water, an expensive necessity in Mecca, was carried daily to the house by sinewy young Yemeni water carriers accustomed to tramping up countless steep flights every day loaded with their heavy cans. The cans were slung from a yoke across their shoulders. Up the stone stairs, they toiled to empty their cans with a satisfying splash into stone cisterns with taps at the base set in the washroom walls. The washrooms were kept clean by a thorough sluicing daily.

Next to my husband's room and overlooking a dusty light well festooned with bird droppings was a small room of the category we later heard described as "box" on our second *Hajj*. Having no daylight other than the meager amount filtering down the light well, the room was rather dark. But, dark or not, it was highly valued by whoever rented it because of its privacy. As such, it was suitable for a married couple or a small family, and a small family was in occupation at the moment. Into the room's narrow L-shaped space were crammed an elderly and diminutive Gambian *Haja* and her four young grandchildren, not forgetting a perfect paraphernalia of boxes and pots and pans. Despite being a grandmother, the *Haja* was sprightlier than many a girl. Yusry and I had met this intrepid lady earlier when we had shared a taxi, so ours was a cheerful reunion at *Haj* Thakafy's.

Yusry kept the Primus on the landing between the rooms, and in the mornings he used to make tea to enjoy with his roommates with whom he had many interesting discussions. He always reserved a cup for the Gambian *Haja* who surely appreciated kindness in the midst of her preoccupation with caring for the

children. In retrospect, I am full of admiration for her. How on earth did she manage traveling alone and coping with her brood? I can only conclude Divine Providence saw to it a kindly *Haj* was always at hand whenever the handling of passports, papers, transport, luggage, or accommodation was involved!

Once, when sleeping arrangements became temporarily disorganized, Yusry asked if I might spend the night in her room. The *Haja* was most welcoming, clearing a space in the midst of her mass of belongings, augmented that day, she informed me, by the addition of the huge tin trunk gaily painted with flowers. The grandchildren were packed along the wall, where they lay under their blanket solemnly rolling their great eyes at me, without a sound.

Below us, every room, nook, and cranny were crammed with the faithful and their luggage. The old house was alive with the tramp of feet on stairs, the sound of voices as *Hujjaj* came and went, to and from prayers at the *Haram* or carrying out the first rites.

Although our fee did not include food, we of the *Hareem* apartment above were always invited to join in the main meal. The *Hajas* contributed whatever they liked toward the meal. This was served in true Arab style from a large platter set on the floor. The food was scooped up with pieces of the excellent local bread. Sometimes the *Hajas* sent out one of the boys who did the cleaning and ran errands for extra items of food. Yusry and I, on our way back from the dawn prayer in the *Haram*, used to buy tinned cheese and fresh fruit and bread to enjoy for breakfast, sharing these with any roommate who cared for them. *Haja* Wadida and I both preferred this lighter fare, and we usually sat together nibbling our bread and cheese, while everyone else dipped in heartily to a dish of beans and fried eggs swimming in fat. It may be the beans were the favorite *Ful Medames*, most popular and staple breakfast fare for millions of Egyptians. *Ful Medames* are so solid they have to be cooked all night. I knew such a rich breakfast dish was not for me!

At lunchtime, the *Hajas* fortified themselves with a dish of meat and vegetables, again swimming in fat, a diet I knew from unfortunate experience in Egypt did not lend itself happily to

my digestive processes. Instead, Yusry and I used to go out for lunch. I was afraid of looking too conspicuous in the neighboring cafés but I need not have worried because other *Hajas* could be seen also taking a meal out, although the majority of customers were men.

Yusry and I had a favorite restaurant just around the corner from the house. It had tables set both inside and on the narrow pavement. We chose outside, as the interior did not look very inviting, besides being stiflingly hot. Customers had the choice between sitting and boiling near the huge, ever-steaming kettle and a vast caldron of rice or broiling in front of barbecuing chicken every time the oven's glass door was opened. Still, despite the heat, we found our daily meal of roast chicken and rice sustaining though light, and easily digestible.

A very large number of *Hujjaj* carry their own food with them throughout the *Hajj*. Armed with a sufficiency of rice, beans, dried meat, clarified butter, cheese, sugar, salt, and tea, they need only buy bread, vegetables, and fruit. Mecca's myriad little shops and stalls cater to *Hujjaj* in all stages of solvency, having in stock tins of commodities, such as processed cheese and tomato paste, minute in size for the *Haj* who has to watch his pennies.

Life in Mecca is serene, unhurried. The day there seems much longer than it does in cities like London or Toronto or Cairo. In the holy cities, the passage of time is marked by the calls to prayer which depend on the position of the sun. The dawn prayer, *Fajr*, should be said well before the sun rises; *Zohr*, the noon prayer, when it is overhead; *Asr*, the afternoon prayer, when it is midway to setting; *Maghreb*, the sunset prayer, when the sun has sunk below the horizon; and *Esha*, the night prayer, when it is completely dark.

Neither Mecca nor Medina is a large city, so, when the call to prayer, the *Azhan*, rings out over the excellent loudspeaker systems of the *Haram* and the Prophet's Mosque, it can be heard clearly in almost every corner. The voices of the Muezzins, trained, they say, in the same tradition as Bilal who was appointed the first Muezzin by the Prophet, have an extraordinarily compelling power. Coming suddenly out of deep silence, at dawn especially, the *Azhan* seems to leap against the sky;

God is Most Great!

God is Most Great!

I bear witness there is no god but God

I bear witness there is no god but God

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God

Come to prayer

Come to prayer

Come to happiness

Come to happiness

Prayer is better than sleep

Prayer is better than sleep

God is Most Great!

God is Most Great!

There is no god but God

All over the city, pilgrims and citizens prepare to pray. Prayer rugs are spread. The thousands in the *Haram* rise as the *Imam* requests them to form orderly rows. A hush falls over the myriad faithful as they wait for the *Imam* to begin the opening verse of the *Qur'an*. On the flat roof of Thakafy's house, outside their little room, those *Hajas* who have not gone to the *Haram* have spread their mats. Each turns toward the *Haram* and says her prayers independently.

The five daily prayers, the second pillar of Islam, are an act of praise and thankfulness to God, the Compassionate, the Merciful; at the same time they are a plea for guidance from God. While the Muslim prays in direct communication with God and through no intermediary, he feels a wonderful sense of kinship between himself and his fellow worshippers. The pilgrim, of course, feels this kinship especially strongly for the group he finds himself living or traveling with. It forms a lasting bond of friendship.

The *Hajj* for me is full of unforgettable memories, and among the loveliest are the times when I joined the *Hajas* in the night prayer on the rooftop under the immense arch of the Arabian sky.

V

Friday in Mecca

Certainly the first house appointed for men is that one in Mecca blessed and a guidance for the nations. In it are clear signs.

[The Qur'an]

Friday is to the Muslim what Sunday is to the Christian, the day of congregational prayer. It is obligatory for all adult men to attend these prayers. In some Muslim communities outside the Muslim world, the Friday noon prayers can hardly be offered unless special arrangements are made, and so there is a different feeling about the day.

During the *Hajj*, women also attend in large numbers, the groups in white interspersed among the Saudi groups of women frequently swathed in black.

On my first Friday in Mecca, I went down with the *Hareem*. Even *Haja* Wadida had struggled to her feet to join us, eager to attend congregational prayer. The crowds grew denser as we approached the *Haram*. Near the Mosque, our eldest *Haja* declared she was feeling tired so would prefer to stay where she was. Around us were others also preparing to sit outside on their prayer rugs and then say the prayers led by the broadcast voice of the *Imam*. This is the wiser course for anyone infirm, because the crowding at this time is at its maximum when almost every pilgrim in Mecca joins the congregation.

Now some of us made for a side door so as to avoid the crush at the main entrance where *Hujjaj* pausing to remove their

sandals mingled with others making their way out. But the Turkish Tyrant, crimson-faced and gesticulating masterfully from the steps of the main door, compelled us to follow her meekly. Holding on to each other, we struggled through the milling throng. At the same time, hundreds of *Hujjaj* were trying to get out because the prayers were not due to begin for a while, adding to the *mêlée*. The crush was unlike any other I had ever seen or experienced. Thousands of *Hujjaj* were pouring into the *Haram* in search of a space in which to wait and then pray on the prayer rugs most of them were carrying over their shoulders. Led with stentorian shouts by the Tyrant, our little Indian file forced its way inside. But, once this objective was achieved, it was clearly impossible to get farther, so, urged on by more shouts, we made our way directly to the left. Here, there was a space flanked by shallow steps. At the top stood a line of armed soldiers. The Tyrant led us to a place near the wall, but the soldiers for some reason objected to this and urged us away with fierce cries and gesticulations. At this point, the Tyrant showed us she had a sense of humor; winking broadly in our direction, she sank to the ground and pretended to burst into tears to convince the soldiers of her womanly weakness and weariness compelling her to stay where she was. Probably one of them noticed the wink, for we were moved forward firmly to find new places at their feet.

We had become part of a small sea of women of various types and colors. Now and then, a few worshippers threaded their way through our ranks toward the stairs leading to the upper balconies. A handful of intrepid men who tried to find space among the *Hajas* was repelled with disapproving cries of "*Hareem! Hareem!*" Despite the feminine objections, however, certain bold men battled their way to find places in the midst of the feminine throng, and there they stayed. Indeed, during the prayers, a *Haj* behind me gave me a sharp push for stepping inadvertently on his prayer mat. When later I remarked on this ungentlemanly behavior to Yusry, he pointed out to me that probably the pilgrim in question was brought up to believe wrongly that the prayer mat when spread must not be touched by anyone but its owner.

Still the faithful came pouring in to the *Haram*, where there

is room for everyone even when it seems not an extra inch of space remains unoccupied.

Considering the vast numbers, the crowding, the unfamiliar languages, and the differing races and temperaments gathered together in close proximity, it is a wonder tempers are not lost more often. For the most part, everyone shows self-control and patience, but naturally occasions arise when fiery temperaments get the better of these virtues. The soldiers above us formed an amused audience for a little scene played out between two *Hajas* one ebony and Junoesque, the other ivory and slightly built. A battle of wills was taking place for a few inches of room. Voices were raised. The next moment, the ivory *Haja* lost her temper and gave Juno a stinging slap across the face. At once cries of "*Haraam! Haraam!*" resounded from all sides. ("Forbidden! Forbidden!") Quieted, the ivory *Haja* sat down but her adversary was making strange grimaces in the direction of the soldiers, rolling her eyes toward the other *Haja* and gesturing a knife stroke across the throat. Her meaning was clear enough, but the absurdity of it had the soldiers grinning. Eventually the injured party calmed down, soothed by the sympathy of her neighbors.

I must record the fact that, throughout all my Pilgrimages, this was the only incident of its kind I saw.

By this time, every available inch of space on the *Haram* floor was occupied. *Hujjaj* streaming up the marble stairs were filling the balconies: statuesque ebony Nigerians, Somalis and Ghanaians, some in pastel-hued robes embroidered at neck, hem and sleeve, others in boldly patterned robes in autumnal tints . . . dignified Sudanese wearing sugar white; snowy turbans wound about vivid orange skullcaps . . . stately, bearded Afghanis in loosely wreathed khaki turbans and long, loose tunics worn over matching trousers . . . sturdy, compact Turks in waistcoats and baggy trousers and variegated knitted caps, their women half-hidden in voluminous headscarves, blouses and skirts. Delicate, fine-boned Indonesians of pale-yellow skin, in patterned shirts and saronglike garments and small, neat black velvet caps, the women always immaculately concealing their hair under spotless,

lace-edged headdresses reaching to below the waist and firmly tied with tapes at the back of the head . . . olive-skinned Egyptians, both slim and portly, the country men wearing *galebeyas* of blue, gray, green or brown cotton, with white or colored turbans wound about their skullcaps . . . robust, rosy-cheeked Libyan women all bundled up from head to heel in white and black checked cotton, kilted by a broad sash, Iranian women swathed in dark blue, finely patterned . . . Indian women—they could be thin and slight and garbed in cotton saris of saffron or rust colour, or taller and plumper and wearing tunics and trousers of various shades, with diaphanous headscarves . . . Algerians and Tunisians whose elegant brown, gray or green caftans had decorative embroidery at neck, sleeve and hem, and a pointed hood . . . slender Saudis garbed in their elegant, milky white, close-fitting gowns and headdresses secured by the black silk *Ikal* . . . Saudi women hidden in their black wrappers, revealing only a flash of wide, vibrant colored skirts that often brushed the floor.

How splendidly colorful a congregation! Could its like be seen anywhere else in the world?

The hum of *Qur'anic* recitation, of prayers intoned, of intermittent conversation around me, was overlaid by a sense of expectancy as everyone waited longingly for the *Azhan*, the call to prayer. At last, it pealed out and all the vast concourse grew silent. Now the *Imam* gave the Friday sermon. His theme was the history and significance of the rites of *Hajj*. He spoke also about the noble Islamic concept of the brotherhood of all believers. The *Imam* stressed the urgent need for brotherhood during this period when certain Islamic lands were under enemy occupation and air attack. We in Egypt, Syria and Jordan had been defeated, he declared, because we had strayed far away from the true Islamic concepts of obedience to God and to the laws of God revealed to us in the Holy *Qur'an*. Only by returning to these and by acting in unison, as the followers of the Prophet had in the early days of Islam, could the Muslims finally win the battle and regain their lost lands.

The sermon ended, the *Imam* led the prayers. On Friday,

these take the same form as the dawn prayer of two ritual bowings and prostrations, each following the recitation of the opening verse of the *Qur'an* and then another verse.

It may be of interest to include two of the short *Qur'anic* verses often said during any of the five daily prayers. Here are two, distilling in essence something of the noble message of the *Qur'an*;

By the time!

*Surely man is in loss,
Except those who believe and do good,
and exhort one another to Truth,
and exhort one another to patience.*

Say: He, Allah, is One.

*Allah is He on Whom all depend.
He begets not, nor is He begotten;
And none is like Him.*

The vast congregation stood, bowed, stood again, and prostrated themselves to God, so many loving hearts eager to show their devotion.

When the forehead of the worshipper is pressed to the ground, he often feels nearest to God, because then much of his body, which God gave him, is near the earth that by God's will supports him.

He now shows his complete dependence on God, his Maker. He exists by the will of God, he has journeyed to Islam's most sacred place and now shows his gratitude by praying in the same way as his beloved Prophet, the beloved of God in the very place where Abraham first demonstrated the concept of obedience to God.

The bowings and prostrations are signalled by the intoning of the phrase "*Allahou Akbar!*" (God is Most Great!) by the *Imam*,

echoed by the Muezzin beside him, so that all may hear and follow as the *Imam* leads.

Like a field of corn before the wind, the thousands bow and rise and prostrate themselves, each of them turned toward the *Kaabah*. What beauty and mystery lies in this united act of worship, leaving an unforgettable imprint on the memory of everyone taking part!

VI

Mina and Arafat— The Peak of Pilgrimage

*It is no sin from you that you seek bounty from your Lord.
So when you press on from Arafat, remember God near the
Holy Monument and remember Him as He has guided you,
so before that you were among the erring ones.*

[The Qur'an]

After about two weeks in Mecca, we were to leave for Mina. Joining in the vast exodus from Mecca, *Hujjaj* and citizens stream from the city on their way to take part in the day consecrated to prayer and meditation that is the main rite of the *Hajj*. This rite takes place on the plain of Arafat, where the Prophet preached his last sermon. Following the Prophet's example, the day before the ceremony at Arafat is generally spent in Mina.

Everyone in Thakafy's house was happy at the prospect of setting out for the ceremony marking the peak of Pilgrimage. We in the *Hareem* took an age to get dressed that morning, because all of us wanted to take a bath in the hot water that had been heated since early morning in a huge copper tub on a bottled gas ring in the washroom. Then, resplendent in our fresh white *Ihram* we descended to the waiting taxis and buses.

The men also had bathed and put on their *Ihram*, the dress signifying the pilgrim's state of purity and his intention to fulfill the rites of the great or lesser Pilgrimage, or both. The *Ihram* is assumed for three or four days, during which the pilgrim is staying in Mina and Arafat.

The taxis and buses, cars, vans, and lorries now pouring out of Mecca were loaded with pilgrims and their camping equipment. The chanting of "*Labbaikallahoma Labbaik!*" from passing lorry loads of *Hujjaj* sounded every now and then above the roar of traffic. Yusry and I shared a taxi with the Gambian *Haja* and her solemn brood of grandchildren. I wonder how she managed during the tough period of camping; we lost sight of her once we arrived in Mina. We had decided to take with us only the cooking equipment, sufficient food for four days, a blanket, sheet and pillows, all bundled into the old green rug.

Mina is only about six kilometers from Mecca, so it is soon reached. It is a small, attractive town encircled by rocky mountains. In summer, the heat there is said to be murderous; the mountains reflect the heat and keep out most of the cooling breezes. Now the mountains, dotted over with white tents, appeared to be sprouting mushrooms among the rocks. The houses of Mina looked surprisingly tall to me. Many of them are plastered in blue or gray with carved, unstained woodwork.

Mina's main street, long and broad, is the setting for one of the final rites of the *Hajj*; the symbolic stoning of the Devil.

The house provided by *Haj* Thakafy for his pilgrim guests was three stories high. It had a very narrow entrance with a blue door and thick stone walls to keep out the worst of the summer heat. When we arrived, all the rooms were already occupied, mostly by *Hajas* on the upper floors, the Egyptian *Hareem* occupying the largest room on the top floor. Two of the *Hajas* called to me to join them. They made room for me between their pallets, but they had hardly enough space for themselves. It would have been uncomfortably cramped sleeping there. I preferred to stay out of doors with my husband and other *Hujjaj*, both men and women, in the large tent pitched in the yard at the back of the house. I was glad to see *Haja* Wadida settled in among friends, her pallet against the wall. Safe with the Egyptian *Hareem*, she had no need of Yusry's care then, although he was able to assist her a few days later. The formidable Turkish Tyrant had not yet arrived with the rest of her family, I noticed.

In the yard, Yusry and I found several tented areas sheltering

Pakistani, Indian, Sudanese, and Egyptian *Hujjaj*. Suppers were prepared on spirit stoves. We were tired, and soon after supper we said our prayers, spread the rug and blankets on the ground, and quickly fell asleep.

The sound of the dawn *Azhan* woke us. Everyone had of course slept in *Ihram* clothes, the Hajas unpinning their head-veils to leave their hair covered only by the white kerchiefs worn underneath. We all hurried to wash for the dawn prayers, spreading our prayer rugs in the dim light of dawn. As soon as we had breakfasted, we made ready to be taken by bus and taxi to Arafat.

On the road again, we merged with the thousands riding and walking to Arafat. Large lorries with open, wood-slatted sides, and smaller ones, some brightly decorated; vans of Japanese make, compact and neat, their sides embellished with bands of wrought iron worked in geometric and stylized floral designs; taxis and cars, mostly new—every vehicle was filled to bursting with the faithful and their baggage. A few were walking, and Yusry told me they probably did so from choice, out of humility to God like those pilgrims who used to prefer traveling at least part of the way by camel, because that was the manner of the Prophet's journeying. As a matter of fact, we would have preferred to do the same, but not a camel had we seen since arriving in Saudeya. He has been banished from the main thoroughfares for the sake of expediency and also because, to the Saudis, he is a symbol of the backwardness they are so anxious to remove. But, in removing the camel totally from the scene, something of the charm of traveling, affectionately described in the past by Burton, Philby, and others, has undoubtedly been lost. The eye longs to see the living image of animal and rider, a natural part of the desert landscape; instead, it wanders over acres of motorized transport, of lifeless metal.

I like St. John Philby's description of a female rider he saw from his car window on the way from Mina in 1933:

A woman of the Badawin, veiled from the gaze of man and modestly muffled in garments that hid her form, trotted gaily through the slowly wending crowd of those who walked and those who rode in litters. Without saddle or bridle she sat back on the

lean rump of her dromedary and I mused as my car carried me home through the pilgrim streams, that I had seen in her and her surroundings, the spirit of Arabia coursing through the veins of Islam.

Arafat is a vast plateau ringed by low hills. It is known to be the site of the main part of Pilgrimage since the dawn of Islam fourteen centuries ago. It was also the setting for the Prophet's last sermon when he himself was making the *Hajj*. Islamic legend has it this was the place where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Ishmail, his son.

We stepped out of the taxi to see the entire plain and lower hillsides covered with a multitude of tents of every description. Tent sites belonging to individual *Moutawafs* were identified by large signs. Roadways through the encampment were alive with the din and bustle of arriving motor transport and disembarking passengers. Luckily for us, *Haj* Thakafy's tents were pitched near the edge of the sea of canvas, or we could easily have lost our way.

The gigantic encampment was very well organized; there were tented accommodations for half a million or so *Hujjaj*, plentiful pure drinking water supplied from nearby reservoirs and any number of individual tented latrines. The World Health Organization later congratulated Saudi Arabia on the complete absence of any epidemic, no mean achievement, considering that the entire pilgrim companionship is collected in this place for one day, and at Mina for three, under inevitably crowded conditions.

Not so very many years ago, serious epidemics used to break out among the pilgrim fellowship staying in the holy cities and making the journey. Smallpox and cholera in particular took a deadly toll of casualties in certain years. Nowadays, when the Saudi authorities take such good care to prevent epidemics and to hospitalize at once any serious cases of illness among the *Hujjaj*, it is sad to read Doughty's account of the cholera years when, "The deceased and dying were trussed with cords upon the lurching camels' backs . . . and all was fear, no man not musing he might be one of the next to die and never come home to his house."

As Yusry and I gazed around, *Haj* Thakafy emerged from one of his tents.

"The *Hareem* are collecting in that tent with the *Haja*," he told us, referring of course to his mother-in-law.

"Your wife would do best to join them," Thakafy said to Yusry; "the *Haja* will explain the rites of Arafat to her."

Yusry objected quickly, "I can explain them best to her—after all, I've done so from the beginning."

"The *Haja* will explain them better," *Haj* Thakafy insisted, growing visibly annoyed.

"In English?" asked my husband pointedly. Thakafy looked daggers. Clearly, he was rarely crossed, and no doubt he thought me dreadfully rebellious. But how could his mother-in-law explain the rites to me, when she knew no English, and my Arabic was so elementary? The logic was inescapable. Besides, Yusry, with his experience of two previous Pilgrimages and his extensive reading on Islamic subjects, was as well qualified as anyone to instruct me. Also, quite simply, I felt more comfortable with my husband.

Seeing Yusry was adamant, *Haj* Thakafy pointed out another tent in which he found a space for us among its Pakistani occupants, who, as it happened, were not many. The *Hujjaj* were sitting in quiet meditation, reciting prayers or reading from their *Qur'ans*, aloud or silently.

We spread our prayer rugs and opened our *Qur'ans*. My *Qur'an*, the constant companion in my travels since leaving England ten years before, is the translation by Mohammad Ali. Each page is divided into Arabic and English texts, and the extensive and scholarly footnotes are most helpful, although I subsequently learned there is some question regarding certain unorthodox interpretations of his.

After a while, Yusry went away for an hour or two with a group of Sudanese to join them in the noon prayers. Whenever possible, it is better to pray in congregation than alone. He was away so long, I was afraid he might have lost his way among the sea of tents, something that happens to many a pilgrim.

I sat and read the *Qur'an* for a time. Now and then, different

sounds were registered in my consciousness, the low, soothing intoning of the group of *Hujjaj* nearby, the delicious splash of plunging water as fresh supplies were emptied from large cans slung from the water carriers' shoulder yokes into the aluminum barrel outside the tent.

At last Yusry came back. He explained they had been reciting prayers traditionally repeated at Arafat.

We nibbled some biscuits and drank a bottle of Coca-Cola which was on sale in the encampment, then rested a little.

During the afternoon of Arafat Day, the pilgrim may climb one of the hillsides and stand facing toward Mecca to meditate and pray. This is an old Islamic tradition. Yusry and I went out and climbed a short way, then sat down on some rocks. The arid plain of Arafat, circled by its famed mountains, is a place of airy vastness. For a single day every year it springs to life when filled by the pilgrim host. Then more than a million faithful offer up their prayers to the One God, seeking His blessings and fearing His wrath. Each believer is a link forged by faith into the bond of international brotherhood reaching to every corner of the earth. A collective consciousness of God breathes in Arafat among the pilgrims praying in their tents, on the rocky slopes and sandy plateau, standing with hands outstretched. Looking out over the ocean of white tents, one thought of that day fourteen hundred years ago. The Prophet Muhammad had come to this place to deliver his last sermon.

* * *

He spoke from a spot marked today by a white stone obelisk on the hillside. The Prophet was nearing the end of his life and had lived to see the formerly warring tribes of the Arabian peninsula united. He had put an end to polytheism and also to the barbaric customs that had in the past degraded Arabian society—inhuman customs such as burying unwanted girl babies alive, the inheriting of wives like so many household goods, unlimited polygamy, and the perpetuation of blood feuds. Instead, the Prophet had established a rule based on *Qur'anic* law, of worship of the

The Fifth Pillar

one God and respect for the rights and property of others. He had enjoined the good treatment of slaves and encouraged their emancipation.

Now he had journeyed to Mecca and Arafat on the *Hajj*, and it is said his following numbered over one hundred thousand when they gathered to listen to his sermon. In those days that multitude must have represented quite a significant amount of the population. Preaching while mounted on his faithful camel, Al Kaswa, the nobility of Muhammad's words inspires us as strongly now as it did on that far-off day in Arabia:

O people! Listen to my words because it may be the last time I shall meet you in this place.

You people! Your lives and property are sacred and inviolable amongst one another until you appear before God, sacred as this day and this month are sacred to all. And remember you will have to appear before your Lord who shall demand from you an account of all your actions. . . .

O people! You have rights over your wives and your wives have rights over you. Treat your wives with kindness and love. Verily you have taken them on the security of God, and have made their persons lawful unto you by the words of God. . . .

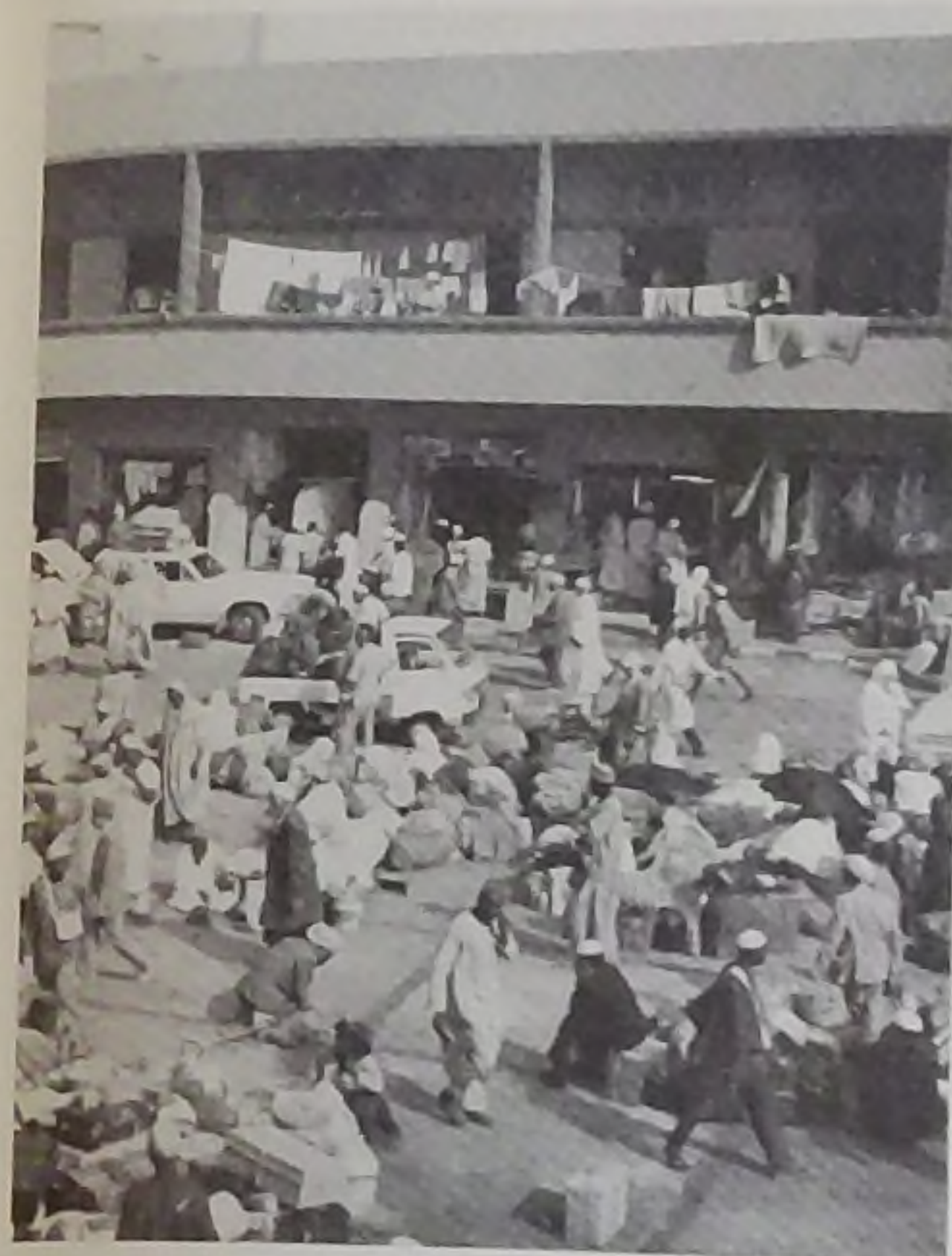
Keep always faithful to the trust reposed in you and avoid sins.

Usury is forbidden. The debtor shall return the principal and the beginning will be made with the loans of my uncle Abbas, son of Abdel-Mottaleb.

Henceforth the vengeance of blood practiced in the days of paganism is prohibited and all blood feud abolished. . . .

And your slaves! See that you feed them with such food as you eat yourselves, and clothe them with the stuff you wear; and if they commit a fault which you are not inclined to forgive then part from them, for they are the servants of the Lord and are not to be harshly treated.

O people! Listen to my words and understand the same. Know that all Muslims are brothers one unto another. You are one brotherhood. Nothing which belongs to another is lawful unto his



Jeddah—the pilgrim reception area at the airport.



Pilgrims arriving at Jeddah.

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Pilgrims arriving at Jeddah.



The new pilgrim reception area
at Jeddah Airport.



Jeddah old and new.



Mecca. Pilgrims entering the *Haram*.



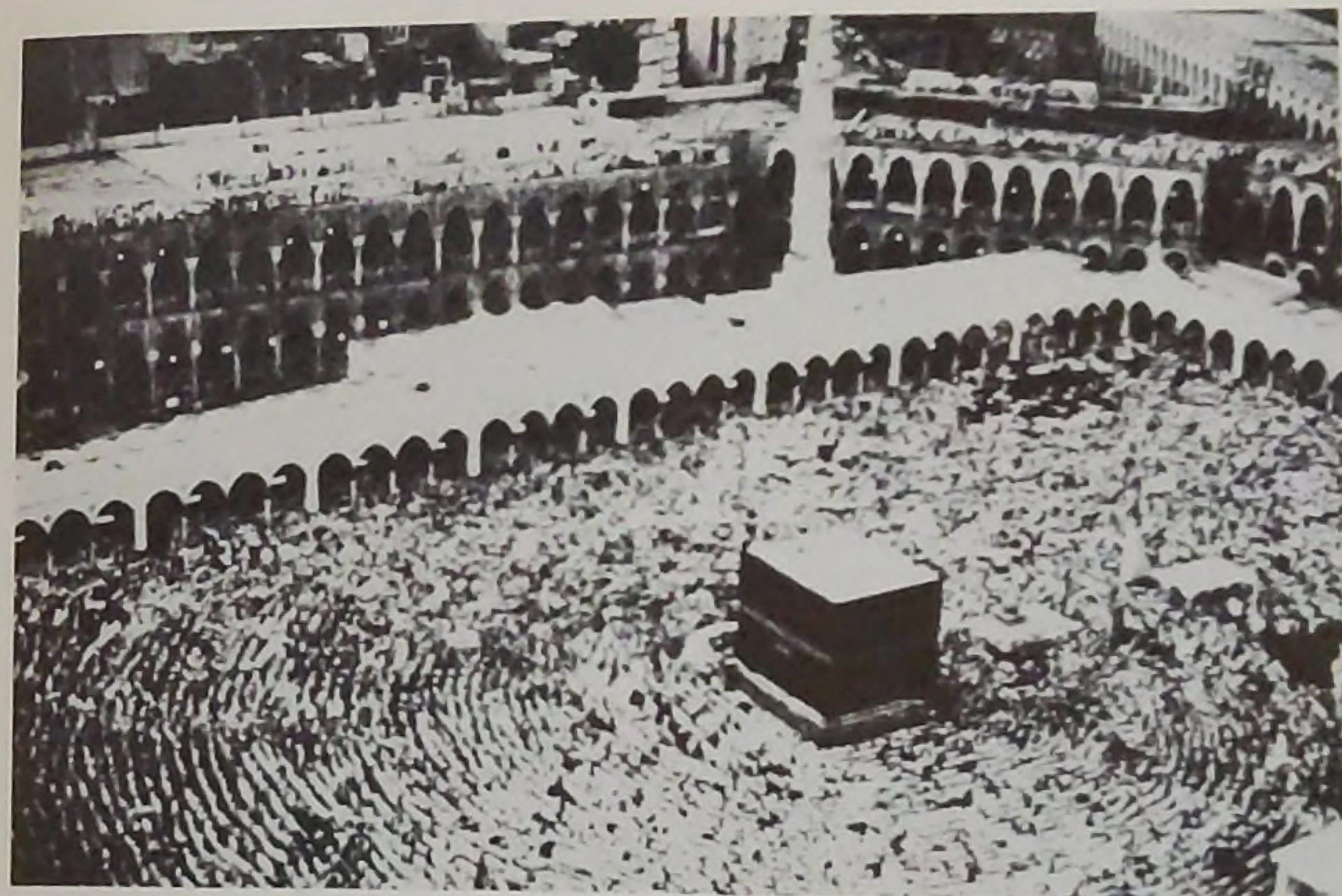
The author outside the *Haram* in
Mecca, with the main entrance partly
shown.



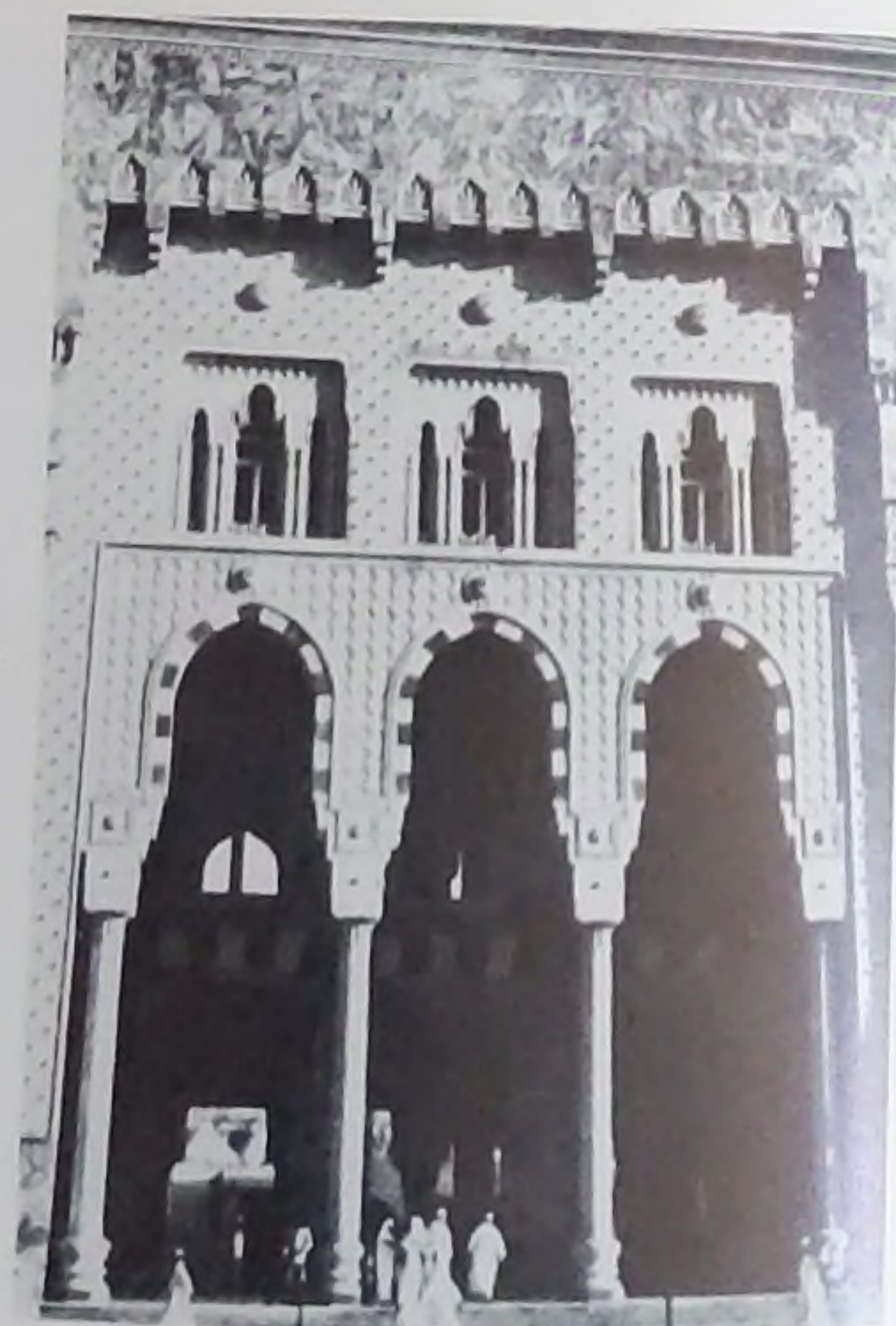
Mecca the Noble.



Mecca. A view of the *Haram*.



The faithful pray facing toward the *Kaabah*.



Mecca. The main entrance to the *Haram*.



The first balcony of the *Haram*.



Hujjaj carrying out the Saie, the sevenfold walking between the "hills" of Safa and Marwa.



Symbolic stoning of the Devil at Mina.



Pilgrim crowds at Mina.

Hujjaj leaving Mina on foot, out of humility to God.





Hujjaj carrying out the Saie, the sevenfold walking between the "hills" of Safa and Marwa.



Symbolic stoning of the Devil at Mina.



Pilgrim crowds at Mina.

Hujjaj leaving Mina on foot, out of humility to God.





Traffic streaming from Mina.



Pilgrims and old houses in Mecca.

brother unless freely given out of good will. Guard yourselves from committing injustice.

On hearing this sermon, the people rejoiced but the devoted Abu Bakr wept because he knew the Prophet's mission on Earth was now completely fulfilled, and he was not much longer for this world.

* * *

My mind was jerked back into the present, as, overhead in the clear sky, a helicopter whirred into view. We had seen one earlier in the day observing and helping to control the congested traffic along our route.

Among the rocks and around our feet, we watched small, long-legged black beetles marching about. No living creature should be harmed on this sacred day at Arafat, not even the tiniest ant according to Islamic law. We had an enhanced feeling of the presence of God; these tiny creatures, also part of His creation, must not be harmed by us who were merely other creatures of God's making.

We stood up facing Mecca to pray. Scattered over the hillside around us other pilgrims were doing the same. We asked God for forgiveness and thanked Him for His kindness in enabling us to fulfil the *Hajj*. We prayed for divine guidance, that we might be filled with enlightenment. We prayed to be protected from atheism and from all harm. We said many prayers ending with one for the health and happiness of those relatives and friends whom we knew to be ill or in trouble.

As we stood there looking toward the distant hills, there came a delightful breeze from the direction of Mecca.

On returning to Egypt we learned to our joy that by the grace of God most of our prayers had indeed been answered.

It had been a beautiful day, quite mild although we were in the open desert and, when not in our tents, fully exposed to the sun. The sunshade Yusry had advised me to bring had hardly been necessary.

Between Arafat and Mina lies the plain of Muzdalifa, to which all pilgrims must proceed not much later than sunset of Arafat Day. Shortly after sunset, we climbed into our bus and sat crammed in the back seat with Pakistani *Hujjaj* for a while. It was hot, but my window was jammed shut, and I could not move my feet an inch. Ahead, behind, and to our right stood vehicles crammed with the faithful, all patiently waiting to move.

At last, after an age of waiting, with a loud clashing of gears, our bus got under way—only to stop again a couple of minutes later. So we inched our way ahead, stopping and starting for what seemed an interminable time. Darkness fell. Everyone was too tired to continue with "*Labbaikallahomma Labbaik!*" Some of us tried to sleep, but there was nowhere to lean one's head. The bus started and stopped and stopped and started endlessly. Peering out into the darkness, I was startled to see a strange apparition, a dusky face floated by, weirdly lit by green electric goggles. Were they to help him see in the dark or just to be seen?

Now our lane of traffic seemed to be stuck. Alongside us the procession of trucks, buses, cars, vans, and taxis churned past unabated. At last our driver became impatient at the delay and swung off the main road to cross a patch of desert, bumping and careening between moving and stationary cars to reach a secondary road where the lines of traffic flowed more freely.

Of course, the delays were unavoidable; even with several roads and numbers of traffic policemen in operation the tremendous volume of traffic could not possibly move faster, especially since it was night time.*

Finally we reached Muzdalifa, where the pebbles must be collected to be thrown at the symbolic Devil the next day. Each pilgrim must collect forty-nine pebbles, which should not exceed

*Recently, in 1976, numerous new roads, flyovers and bridges have been built, making the trip far easier and reducing the time of getting from Arafat to Muzdalifa from almost a whole night to less than an hour. In addition, powerful sodium luminaires have been set up in Muzdalifa and Mina. These, together with the extensive new accommodation for *Hujjaj* in Jeddah have helped the pilgrims immensely.

the size of a pea in order to avoid injuring someone if thrown carelessly. This symbolic stoning is one of the final rites of the *Hajj*.

It was quite dark when we climbed down from our bus, but the sky was brilliant with stars and a half-moon. By the starlight, we could make out the ghostly forms of the faithful hunting in every direction for their pebbles. A few of them carried torches, gleaming fitfully in the shadows. Dark shapes of parked vehicles loomed up at intervals. The oncoming stream of arriving traffic was signaled by the flash of headlights in the darkness.

Yusry and I said our prayers, the sunset and night prayers combined, since we were on a journey, during which period, shortened and combined forms of the prayers are permitted.

Then we hunted around and found our pebbles with the help of a torch, collecting several extra for any that might miss their aim.

I must admit to feeling very tired then, and, wrapping myself in the dressing gown Yusry had thoughtfully urged me to bring along, I lay down on our blanket on the ground and drifted into a peaceful sleep under the stars, while Yusry remained for some time praying and meditating.

The idea that there might have been any harmful snakes or insects around never occurred to me, but, no doubt, if there had been, the scurrying human figures among them would soon have scared even the bravest snake away. I woke before long, conscious of the *Hujjaj* all around us hunting for their pebbles. Yusry slept peacefully on. But the bus driver was impatient to be off because he was sure we would be held up all the way to Mina, now only a few miles distant. However, some members of our party preferred to keep to the tradition of the Prophet and to remain at Muzdalifa until the dawn prayer. They persuaded the driver to stay, so I rolled myself up in the dressing gown once more and fell asleep till dawn.

We woke to say the dawn prayer, then climbed into the bus in which many passengers were still asleep. The bus was full. A *Haja* with a young child made room for me, but poor Yusry, who was very weary, had to stand. The driver had guessed right, and

our progress was no faster than before. An hour of being crushed, pushed, stepped on, and half-suffocated convinced us it would really be better to get off and walk, joining the procession of others walking. What a relief it was to get out into the fresh air.

On reaching the outskirts of Mina, we sank down at the first little pavement café for tea, its cheerful young proprietor calling out the familiar greeting "*Marhaban ya Hajj!*" (Welcome O Pilgrim!) How I agree with St. John Philby's praise, "There is no equal to tea for the way-weary wanderer."

It was still dark, but the brightly lit street was busy as if it were daytime. The faithful and the traffic streamed by, while every tiny soft-drink stand held *Hujjaj* enjoying some much-needed refreshment.

The time to begin the last rite, stoning, is at sunrise, so Yusry said we should make our way to the most strategic spot and wait.

VII

Mina— The Three Days of the Feast

O people! Be steady as good deeds are not measured by haste.

[Saying of the Prophet]

At Mina, the pilgrim must fulfill his triple obligation of stoning the Devil—the enemy of mankind being symbolized by three large stones each set at some distance from the other. This final rite commemorates the three occasions when, tradition maintains, Iblis (Satan), appeared before Abraham, Hagar, and their son Ishmail but was put to flight by the stones they threw at him, being seven in number in each case. Satan, most likely appearing in the form of a man, had tried to make them disobey God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son.

The Prophet ordained that this rite be carried out by his followers to demonstrate to them their strength when acting together. Although each individual was weak and armed only with a pebble, acting together as brothers in Islam their collective strength was great in repulsing evil.

As they throw, the pilgrims glorify God, call on Him to accept their *Hajj*, to bless their efforts and forgive their sins. Today the throwing could almost be taken as a physical expression of Islam's fight against evil while at the same time constituting an act of unquestioning obedience to the Messenger of God.

In his book *Islam*, Professor Guillaume has pointed out how the passage on Pilgrimage in the *Qur'an* does not explain or set out the rites "for the obvious reason that those to whom it was addressed were perfectly familiar with them. We know that

Muhammad suppressed certain customs and modified others but unfortunately we do not know what the ceremony performed by the heathen Arabs actually was."

We infer from the *Qur'an* that Abraham initiated Pilgrimage to the one God in Mecca and we know that the Prophet Muhammad incorporated some of the old rites with new ones such as the thrice stoning of the Devil.

The stoning must be done on three consecutive days following that of Arafat, and must be within the period of half a day on each occasion. It is because of this time limit that such vast crowds gather. It is now that timid souls dread to venture into the mêlée and official handbooks warn the *Hujjaj* to beware of crowding. For it has happened that a few unfortunates too weak to withstand the crowding have been trampled to death.* The weak or the sick may have the stoning done for them by proxy, but many such are happier completing the rites themselves.

Now Yusry and I set out for the thoroughfare where stand the three Iblis stones. With every step we were moving with or against the tide of pilgrims amidst the blaring of horns, the roaring of buses, lorries and cars; everywhere were *Hujjaj*, walking, walking, walking. This impression became so engraved on my mind that I continued to see it in my dreams long after the *Hajj*.

The time to begin the stoning on the first day after Arafat is sunrise, according to the Prophet's edict. The sun was not yet up, but many *Hujjaj* who were either unaware of this edict or else excused by weakness from throwing when the crowds were too dense, had already begun. A small cloud of pebbles specked the gray sky above the largest Iblis stone. Centuries of wear had shrunk the stone back into the thick wall in which it is set. To perform the rite correctly, the stone itself should be hit, not the wall, and pebbles larger in size than a pea should not be thrown. But some *Hujjaj* did not know this. They were hurling their plastic

*Since 1975, the original road has been broadened and surmounted by a huge concrete and steel causeway. This makes the stoning possible from two levels and reduces the dangers of overcrowding.

sandals at the stone, and, if they missed it, counted the wall as worthy a target. Later in the day, the largest Iblis stone was almost buried in sandals while the street, for hundreds of yards around, was littered with torn paper bags and broken sandals ripped from trampling feet. Since neither Burton nor Philby mentions sandal-throwing, it may well have been that leather ones were too precious to part with in their day.

The sky was still gray with first light as we took up our positions near a group of squatting *Hujjaj* also waiting for sunrise. In front of us was a confusion of swinging arms and bobbing heads. Every now and then, lines of the faithful snaked hand-in-hand through the throng, sometimes cannoning into others. These fast-moving lines of *Hujjaj* reminded me of dance groups I had seen from Yugoslavia with the leader setting the pace. It was in truth an extraordinary scene, the Iblis stone surrounded by thousands of faithful assembled to spite the symbolic Devil in obedience to the messenger of God. The mass of pilgrims grew steadily denser, the newly arrived tangling with those who had completed the rite and were frenziedly trying to push their way out.

Yusry thought it would be better if we moved to join a party of sturdy looking African *Hujjaj* who were positioned nearer to the Iblis stone. We inched our way over to them through the seething turmoil. Everyone in the group kept watching the sky. It was growing lighter over the hills. Still the crowd increased. Now and then, individuals with fanatical expressions would charge through the throng, and wild-eyed groups plunge recklessly toward the stone, totally unaware, in their single-minded concentration, of fellow *Hujjaj* knocked aside or of trampling on feet. Two soldiers sat on the wall above the stone as in Philby's time, "whose function," he wrote,

... was to keep order in the midst of a howling chaos and who spent their time grinning benignly as they dodged the ill-aimed pebbles of the faithful. To maintain order was impossible and it was a matter of wonderment that apparently no serious casualty occurred to mar the merriment of a mob gathered to commemorate a historic example of devotion.

Now everyone could see the sun had risen, although it was hidden behind tall buildings. The moment had arrived for which many had been patiently waiting. The phalanx of Africans in whose wake we stood began edging forward, urged on by their brawny leader. The men protected their women by a fence of linked arms. We edged forward with them but then noticed their leader had started throwing while too far away from the stone. Yusry decided to leave the protection of the group and make our way nearer. Linking arms we braced ourselves against the surging cross-currents of humanity, inching gradually nearer until we were level with one side of the Iblis stone.

"Now!" shouted Yusry, for he thought it best that I threw first. My pebbles were clutched firmly in my left hand. I took one, and, with the words, "*Bismillah Allahou Akbar!*" I started throwing. Concentrating hard on aiming well at the same time as keeping my balance, I scarcely felt it when a badly aimed pebble hit me on the cheek. My pebbles gone, now it was Yusry's turn. By clasping him around the waist and digging my heels into the ground I was able to act as a sort of anchor while he flung his seven, plus seven more on behalf of *Haja* Wadida at her request. A turmoil, a roar, a tumult of pilgrims seethed around us, as pebbles flew through the air. Then, suddenly, it was over. Yusry's pebbles were thrown too. Ducking low to avoid the flying missiles, we scurried from the scene. On reaching a calmer spot, we cut a lock of each other's hair to show our submission to God. This completed the main rites of Pilgrimage.

We made our way back to Haj Thakafy's house, almost missing its narrow entrance, walked along the cramped passage filled with bedding and baggage, and emerged in the yard at the back. Picking our way past sitting and lying *Hujjaj*, bundles, Primus stoves and plastic water containers, we came at last to our tent.

Yusry had a cold drink and took a wash, then went off to negotiate for an animal to be sacrificed on behalf of each of us.

The three days following Arafat are known as the Three Days of the Feast. The immense quantities of meat made available for rich and poor from the sacrificed animals are cut up to be cooked

and eaten the same day or else hung in thin strips, like tobacco leaves, to dry in the sun.

During our second Pilgrimage, my husband and I chanced to walk along a narrow trail running between the lengthy wall of the slaughterground and an encampment of what appeared to be extremely poor *Hujjaj*, all crowded together in a cluster of small tents beside which firewood was heaped. Strips of raw meat hung drying in the sun, and huge metal trays and pans filled with chunks of raw meat lay around the tents. Ebony *Hajas* squatted as they cut up meat with onions and tomatoes. Small fry peeped out from the gloom under the canvas. Whites of eyes gleamed in dark faces. Everywhere one looked raw meat was piled in pans or hanging to dry—a fantastic scene. Men threaded their way along the trail bearing bundles of firewood or slaughtered animals. The wood carriers called out "*Khashab! Khashab!*" to clear the way ahead. It was an extraordinarily vivid scene pulsating with life and color.

During this period, every pilgrim should commemorate Abraham's reward of the gift of his son's life won for his obedience to God. The pilgrim should sacrifice either a camel, a sheep, or a goat, or arrange for this to be done on his behalf. Most of the meat should be given to the poor during the three days of the feast.

Yusry came back, bearing with him the hindquarters of a kid. He had been to the vast slaughterground where the ritual killing of the animals is carried out, the Name of God being pronounced as the death stroke is given with the knife. Yusry was quite hoarse from the business of bargaining for an animal while everyone around him had been doing the same. The din was increased, he told me, by the shouts of the Bedouins calling out the prices of their camels, sheep, and goats.

I'm afraid my culinary efforts with that goat meat were not very successful. Having read somewhere it should be simmered at length, I duly put some pieces on the Primus to boil with potatoes and onions. That meat simmered for hours but remained as tough as old leather. Still, the broth had a good flavor, and Yusry invited a couple of tent mates to share it with us for lunch.

For the rest of the afternoon, I slept, while my husband took photographs of *Haj* friends to keep as souvenirs or to send them afterwards if they wanted them. In the evening we went out for a stroll. The streets were always crowded. In one area of the tented city we passed camps flying the respective flags of those countries, including Taiwan, who had sent official missions on pilgrimage.

On the second day of the feast, after saying the dawn prayer and breakfasting well on porridge, condensed milk and fruit, we took a taxi to Mecca in order to carry out the second sevenfold circling and walking, another of the final rites.

As we entered the *Haram*, we prayed that our circling and walking might be made easy for us. It happened that both were accomplished more easily than on the first occasion, because the *Hujjaj* were fewer in number this time, for which blessing we thanked God. Naturally the *Tawaf* is more enjoyable for the pilgrim if he feels undistracted by too great a turmoil.

The circling and walking completed, we made for Thakafy's house. It was empty since everyone was in Mina. The *Hareem* apartment was closed, so I freshened up in the downstairs wash-room, while Yusry changed from his *Ihram* to a white cotton *Galabeya*.

The ritual washing made, we returned to the *Haram*. Entering its great, welcoming, ever-open main door, we had the feeling of coming home again, a feeling that intensifies with every visit to it. To the pilgrim, there is a great satisfaction in the knowledge that he has tried his best to fulfill the commands of God as revealed in the *Qur'an*.

We said the midday prayer then set out for Mina once more. At about half-past two, Yusry and I took up our little bags of pebbles and walked to the place of the Iblis stones. On the second day, twenty-one pebbles must be thrown, seven at each of the Iblis stones.

Before starting, we had prayed again that this second throwing would not be too hard on us. It seemed our prayers were answered, for we found, on reaching the site, that a huge strug-

gling crowd had been there earlier. The dusty ground was strewn for hundreds of yards with broken sandals, pebbles and scraps of torn paper. The biggest Iblis stone was practically submerged in sandals. Most fortunately, we could make our way speedily from the first to the third stone, with each hurled pebble repeating the phrase "*Allahou Akbar!*" This time it was not necessary to brace oneself against the buffeting elements, because the press around the stones was much thinner.

Once again back at *Haj* Thakafy's house, ready for a long drink of water, we noticed the well water had developed an unpleasant taste. In fact, the well was situated too near the over-worked drains for health. We stopped even boiling the water for drinking, preferring to buy it from a purer source.

Our tent was pitched beside the back entrance to the yard, which led directly to the street. The cooking for the camp was done in giant iron caldrons heated over wood fires that snapped and crackled a mere couple of yards beyond the canvas wall of the tent. At times, the heat became uncomfortable as the flames burned fiercely under the bubbling caldrons. Alongside the cooking fires was a large pond for the slops which seemed hourly in danger of overflowing and inundating the tent floor with greasy water and scraps of food. However, when I rather nervously asked Hassan, *Haj* Thakafy's burly, goodnatured assistant, if this could happen, he assured me with a beaming smile, it was an impossibility.

Camping next to us was a little family of very poor Indian pilgrims. The poorest *Hujjaj*, often slightly built and frail, could not help showing their poverty-stricken condition by their emaciated physiques and clothing of the humblest kind. To achieve the *Hajj* obviously represented the expenditure of a lifetime's savings, leaving precious little over for everyday expenses once they arrived.

There was a marked contrast between these poorest of the faithful's physical condition and that of their more prosperous brethren whose rounded forms were clearly used to comfort and plenty.

Our tent mates consisted of the young husband and his timid

silent wife and mother. No doubt, to the little wife, our more numerous possessions suggested a more affluent state, because, one morning, after exchanging smiles, as I cooked our meal, I suddenly felt a hand take mine from behind and a finger tickle my palm. It seemed the little Indian *Haja* was asking for money. I smiled at her, pretending not to understand, and, when Yusry came, I told him about the incident. Yusry told me it was rare to find a pilgrim begging. For one thing, the *Hajj* is obligatory only for those who are financially able to accomplish it. Also, cases of want among pilgrims are generally looked after by charitable organizations representing various Islamic countries. The number of *Hujjaj* who are reduced to begging for money is very small, but of course it can happen that every penny gets spent on the journey and nothing is left for the stay. Later in Medina, we were approached by a couple of *Hujjaj*, heads of families, who told us this is what had happened to them. We did not give the Indian *Haja* money, but, instead, invited her small family to share some of our food. They accepted gladly, afterwards offering us a dish of their own made from wheat grain brought from their home village where it was specially treated to be suitable for a dish similar to porridge.

On the last day of the feast, which was also our last day in Mina, we shook out the rug and blankets, which were heavy with dust and damp and sundry scraps of food from the cooking area on the other side of the canvas wall. Around us everyone else was getting ready to leave, bundling up bedding and belongings.

For the last time, we set out, early in the afternoon, to complete the rites of stoning, with a final twenty-one pebbles. Again we were more fortunate in our timing, because the crowds had thinned considerably, making the final throwing much easier than the first.

During the stay in Mina, *Haja* Wadida had remained immured in the *Hareem* room on the upper floor. She was not well; the crowded community life and unaccustomed food had proved too much for her—as indeed these can prove for anyone not in a robust state of health or unused to living with a total lack of privacy. I found her lying collapsed on her blanket, in a mood of

deep depression that left her impervious to the attempts of the *Hajas* around who were vainly trying to cheer her up. Poor *Haja* Wadida! One night while brushing my teeth in the upstairs washroom (which, I should mention was very clean with white-washed walls and stone floor, one side having a stone channel fitted with taps for washing), I heard an unearthly sound. It was a high-pitched whimpering and mewing noise like nothing I had ever heard before. What could it be? At first I imagined it might be a pilgrim having some kind of nervous crisis. The noise grew louder. It was coming in my direction. Involuntarily I recalled the weird mewing of the leper in Kipling's unforgettable story "The Mark of the Beast." I braced myself for something macabre to appear. What was my amazement to see *Haja* Wadida materialize like an apparition in the doorway!

"*Haja* Wadida!" I said, "whatever is the matter?"

"Oh God!" moaned the poor creature, "I ache in every place—I cannot eat—my stomach is all upset!"

One could only be thankful the "facilities" were as good as they were; otherwise a sick person would dread using them.

I did what little I could to comfort her, then helped her back to her mattress on the floor. I hurried down to fetch a bottle of vitamin tablets in the hope that these might give her a little energy. Immediately the *Hajas* around wanted vitamins too!

On our last day in Mina, it was almost harder finding a taxi than struggling through the crowds. It looked as though every available vehicle was packed to bursting point. We walked for some time against the stream of traffic, searching for a free taxi until we found ourselves almost at the other end of the town.

By tradition, the pilgrim must not remain in Mina beyond sunset on the third day; otherwise, he must stay another day and throw another twenty-one pebbles.

At last we managed to hail a taxi. The driver said he would charge us ten *riyals*, an exorbitant amount for the short distance entailed. But the sun was sinking, and we had to be on our way, so we agreed to his terms. A small party of elderly Turkish *Hujjaj* joined us. They were a merry group, joking and chatting all the way. One of the *Hajas* looked to be at least eighty years

old. What endurance to make the Pilgrimage at that age and to remain so cheerful and serene!

My mind flashed back to the caravan days, when supplies of food and water had to be carefully watched and when there were no antibiotics or ambulances for the sick. The wonder was that so many survived to tell the tale. The joy and relief of having their *Haj* safely home then would be expressed by relatives and friends in days of festivities, rejoicing and feasting.

VIII

Mecca the Noble

Let them finish with their self-neglect and let them fulfill their vows and go about the Ancient House.

[The Qur'an]

It was evening by the time we reached Mecca. *Haj* Thakafy's house was deserted still and the *Hareem* apartment locked. We washed, then walked to the *Haram* for the sunset and night prayers.

Yusry and I felt a great lift of the spirits as we came near the *Haram*, like homing pigeons at the end of their flight. Entering by the ever-open main door, our feet bare on the cool marble, we knew the joy of accomplishment, for, to the best of our ability, we had fulfilled our obligation to God.

We climbed the broad marble stairs to the deep, quiet balcony where we sat down to rest. Around us, the faithful were peacefully sitting, reading the *Qur'an* or reciting aloud in low tones, or simply enjoying resting in Islam's most sacred place. Others were praying. Yusry and I rose to do so, since we had not yet said the sunset prayer. Singly, in couples, or in groups, the faithful drifted in to wait for the night prayer. Gradually, the balcony filled up.

* * *

One is constantly aware of the past in connection with Islam's sacred places.

The Prophet had an early association with the *Kaabah*

while still a young man. In rebuilding the ancient house, in A.D. 605, a dispute had arisen over who should have the honor of raising the Black Stone into its proper place. Each tribe claimed the right. In the end, the tribes' elders proposed the dispute should be settled by the first man to enter by a certain gate. This turned out to be Muhammad. When the problem was put to him his advice was to place the Black Stone in a piece of cloth; then all the representatives of the contending tribes could lift it together. This was duly done and the rebuilding completed without further debate. The wisdom of young Muhammad's judgment made a deep impression on everyone concerned.

Another piece of Islamic history is also connected with the *Kaabah*. Many years after the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina he returned as conqueror to Mecca with his faithful army. The Meccans had for the most part given the Prophet nothing but trouble, hostility, and persecution. They could expect a stern retribution. Instead, Muhammad set a wonderful example of forbearance by declaring to his former enemies, "Go! You are all free."

Then, striding to the *Kaabah*, the Prophet and his followers proceeded to smash every idol in and around it. The sanctuary was now secured for monotheism forever. At this historic moment, Bilal, the Prophet's Abyssinian friend, famous for his powerful voice, was asked to proclaim the *Azhan* for all to hear from the roof of the *Kaabah*. They say it is the descendants of Bilal who have called the *Azhan* in the holy cities ever since.

* * *

The *Azhan* in Mecca has a melody different from the one in Cairo. This is chiefly because the Muezzin's voice is pitched much higher in the holy cities, no doubt in the manner of the powerfully voiced Bilal. For me, the call to prayer in the *Haram* especially always has a wild beauty, seeming, like the lark's song, to flutter ever-higher, until it comes finally to rest on a touching cadence,

La ilaha illa Allah!

There is no god but God!

Now it is time for the night prayer. All over the vastness of the mosque, lights shine out, reflected dimly in marble pillars and floors, while the towering minarets are necklaced with pearls of light. The immense marble colonnades, the deep balconies, the vast courtyard with the black-robed *Kaabah* at its heart, hold thousands and thousands of worshippers. The night prayer, called *Esha*, begins, led by two mellow voices, the *Imam* leading, the Muezzin echoing on a higher note. The silent multitude bows, rises, makes prostration, rises again in congregation, the words of the prayers soundlessly repeated by everyone after the *Imam*. The prayer, the place, the tremendous concourse of faithful blend in a scene of majesty, the like of which can rarely be seen on Earth.

Merely to sit and contemplate the beauty of the *Haram* is a joy in itself. Marble has been extensively used both for exterior and interior. The deep colonnaded balconies are most lovely, having tall pillars of blue-gray and amber alternating in pairs with rectangular pillars surfaced with marble chips of dark and pale gray. The columns are surmounted by square capitals carved in geometric and arabesque motifs in relief. Within each graceful arch is set a green medallion embossed with the Name of God. Yusry estimated the *Haram* could contain approximately two thousand columns in all.

The ceiling of the newer part of the *Haram* is patterned in painted squares of fawn and pink. From centrally spaced squares, each decorated in arabesque, galaxies of brilliant electric lights are hung to coruscate at night.

Much of the floor is also of marble, large amber-colored squares and bands of pale gray veined with darker blue, gray, and amber streaks, subtle variations in color and shape.

While in Mecca, the faithful love to spend as much time as they can in the place which gives them the deepest spiritual con-

tentment. The soul is refreshed by communion with its Maker so that, when the inevitable return to everyday life is made, the pilgrim feels better able to face any problems that may arise. He feels strengthened through the prayers said in congregation or alone, in the place made sacred by God.

The night prayers were over, and most of the congregation were making their way out, although some faithful love to remain, and quite a few spend the night there. These sleeping ones are liable to be woken by the brisk sweeping of bristle brooms wielded by lines of cheery attendants or else by the rapping of sticks held by the strict guardians of the sacred Mosque.

Now, refreshed by the prayer and meditation and rest, Yusry and I walked back to the house. It was that night I spent in the kindly Gambian *Haja's* little room, because the others had still not yet returned. Beaming, she brought out the gifts she had been buying for family and friends to show me. The brand-new flower-painted tin trunk was crammed with purchases: embroidered ivory colored tunics with matching trousers for the children, a gold-embroidered tunic for herself, a glamorous pink sari, various multicolored scarves, several Saudi headdresses, masses of trinkets including golden coins to be made into earrings, gaudy umbrellas for the little ones, and, last, a princely embroidered headdress for herself including the silken-coiled *Ikal* which holds it in place. Proudly she arranged the folds of material around her face, almost dwarfing the elfin features and turned to me for my approval. I couldn't spoil her pleasure by saying this was a headdress worn only by men! So I said she looked lovely, picturing her pride when she stepped off the plane to dazzle nearest and dearest with her finery.

Saucer-eyed, the four small grandchildren lay watching us, quiet as mice. Grandmother, I suspected, kept them in order with a heavy hand when necessary.

For a while, I lay awake, tracing the ghostly shapes of her numerous boxes and bags and cooking pots by the dim light from the landing and wondering how the little *Haja* on her own would manage the transportation of so much stuff.

Next morning, I kept an eye on the stairs until I spotted one

of the Egyptian *Hajas* arriving. I made my farewells to my friend and thanked her for her hospitality. Smiling, she assured me, "You were welcome. It was nothing." I had felt with the Gambian *Haja* that there was a powerful bond of sisterhood, no matter whether we were black or white, linking our hearts. After being with her only a short time I felt I had known her for years.

Upstairs, the *Hajas* were making themselves at home again, sorting out their belongings. The suitcases had to be stowed on the roof, or the room would have been impossibly congested. The only drawback to this arrangement was that the morning sweep meant a different order of stacking each time. The result was a certain amount of confusion as to the whereabouts of a clean petticoat or head kerchief when needed.

As the days passed while we awaited permission from the authorities to move on to Medina, the *Hajas* grew to know each other a little better. We became very friendly with one another and even our masterful landlady seemed less fierce. The picture remains in my mind's eye—the circle of ladies sitting chatting or lying in the little room, the Tyrant reclining odalisque fashion, her head tightly bound by a cotton kerchief, her ample form wrapped in the comfortable expanse of a purple flowered house-dress. Contentedly she puffs at her hubble-bubble, every now and then suspending the mouthpiece to take part in the conversation. The chief diversion was shopping and everyone would compare purchases and prices in the evening. Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah were a joy to shop in, particularly for anyone from Egypt, which country was suffering the inevitable shortages following a war. Watches, electrical appliances, dress materials, and perfume were items in great demand. Of course, everyone looked for the best prayer rugs and beads for herself as well as for gifts. Prayer rugs, chiefly in reds, greens, and blues, depicting the two *Harams* are sold everywhere. Rosaries of a wide description can be found. Perhaps the prettiest are the ones of mother-of-pearl in the little shops around the Prophet's mosque in Medina.

Mecca has a fascinating souk, a long covered way sheltering a profusion of small, open-fronted shops whose goods glow and glitter in a riot of color, ruby, emerald, and sapphire-hued prayer

rugs; diaphanous saris and scarves of rose-pink, midnight-blue and snow-white, threaded with gold; rich brocades and materials shimmering with sequins, golden earrings and bracelets and tiny *Qur'anic* medallions, rosaries gleaming in pearl, garnet, jade-green and jet; rosaries of wood and colored glass: silver trays and platters; coffee cups and jugs with slender, gracefully curved spouts; perfumes in bottles of every size and shape, precious carpets from Persia and Afghanistan. And these are only a few of the wares displayed to tempt the pilgrim to part with too much too soon!

The perfumes of Mecca and Medina are popular with men who like to follow the Prophet's example of perfuming themselves before prayers. Another custom of the Prophet's was the use of a small tooth stick of aromatic wood. Bunches of toothsticks are sold today by pavement vendors. When cut, the wood divides into bristles at one end, useful not only for the teeth but to massage the gums. Because of their association with the Prophet and the holy cities, perfume in small colored vials and bunches of toothsticks are valued gifts for pious men.

Day and night during the *Hajj*, the souk is a bustle of activity. The covered way, the shops, and narrow winding lanes on each side swarm with shoppers. Every now and then, a heavily laden porter calls out for people to make way for him. Shop owners are in their element as they parry the pilgrim's hopeful attempts at bargaining, often reclining at ease among their goods.

As prayer time approaches, shopkeepers hurry to cover their wares, pulling down blinds or spreading lengths of cloth over them—no need for locks. "That's it! Prayers! Prayers!" They call to each other, slinging prayer rugs over their shoulders and rushing to the *Haram*. Drivers also park their cars unlocked, and if in a wrong place one of the young policemen would blow his soft bubbling whistle and merely remark: "Why don't you park it properly? May Allah have mercy on your parents!" When traffic problems become acute the police get much tougher.

Mecca has old streets of great beauty and charm. The houses fit their setting perfectly; those built on high rocky land seem to rise naturally out of the stone, while the venerable houses lining the

streets have about them an air of proud reserve appropriate to the noble city. Houses on the city outskirts stand out against a rocky background. Lofty yet compact, their façades of brick, stone or plaster are frequently colored in refreshing tints of pink, green, or blue. Painted or natural wood shutters and latticed balconies are enhanced by the rocky backdrop of grays and browns.

For the most part, modern buildings appeared to blend happily with their older neighbors. It was interesting to note how some large apartment and office blocks had Oriental touches in decorative stone facings, balconies, windows, and rooftops. But today's architects face a unique challenge in the Holy Cities.

In recent years the public health authorities have made most praiseworthy efforts to clean up the city which travelers in the not so distant past described as "ill-kept and filthy."* There are now numerous litter bins placed prominently in the streets while flies, these days reduced to a fraction of former numbers, are regularly attacked with clouds of insecticide sprayed from trucks or guns. The public washrooms beside the *Haram* are today well lit and constantly sluiced down by attendants with hoses of fresh water.

Water! Not only is the never-failing spring of *Zemzem* a blessing for which the faithful fervently thank God, but the amazing abundance of water for every need in that arid valley where Mecca lies is truly a blessing beyond words. Thirsty *Hujjaj* thronging the hot streets in the killing heat of summer can help themselves to mugs of iced water from thermos tanks set up at the roadside by charitable shop owners and glasses of water are always available free in places where soft drinks are sold.

Coming from Cairo where many grocers are not so particular, we were impressed to find in Mecca and Medina the vegetables, fruit, bread, and cakes on sale were protected by plastic sheeting and sold in plastic bags.

**Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1926.

After prayers in the evenings, Yusry and I were fond of sitting in a little place opposite the *Haram*; the few metal tables were usually taken by other *Hujjaj*. Across the road stood the great Mosque, the glory of Islam, bathed in a soft radiance of light. The towering walls and minarets of loveliest gray and white veined marble had a lustrous glow about them as if suffused with the afterglow of sunset. The golden lattices gleamed and the lights within glittered like pinpoints of fire while the lights encircling the minaret balconies shone a deeper gold. The entire magnificent building had an incandescence as if it lived and breathed with a marvelous and mysterious life of its own.

One evening I was sitting at a table alone (for there is a certain time of the month when women abstain from the prescribed prayers). I sat and waited while my husband joined the congregation. The call to prayer rang out high and clear. Entering the main door, filled with light, were pilgrims wearing their white *Ihrams* and Saudis in their white gowns and headdresses. Along the road came hurrying an old, stooped, bearded man, a grandfather leading his little grandson by the hand. A younger man, perhaps the boy's father, was walking quickly beside them. The old man broke into a sort of rolling run, rather touching to see in comparison with the tiny, nimble feet of his grandson as they twinkled along under the miniature gown.

The smiling young *Weled*, who had brought us tea, suddenly appeared beside me.

"Where is the *Haj*?" He asked kindly.

"He is praying."

"Why are you not praying? You are tired perhaps?"

"Tomorrow, *Inshallah*, I shall pray."

The smiling boy was insistent, "Why not today? Prayer is good. Never mind, I shall go now but I'll be back quickly."

Away he ran across the road, dark kilted figure melting into the shadows between the pools of light.

Walking home at night some time after the *Esha* prayer, Yusry and I saw hundreds of poor *Hujjaj* sleeping out, many without blankets or overcoats. The temperature in Mecca, and

in Medina which is situated even higher, is liable to drop at night as it does in the desert. This naturally can be hazardous for anyone with a weak chest, especially when a person is elderly and not physically robust. But every *Haj* and *Haja* depends on God and so puts his or her trust in Him, knowing that any hardship suffered on the Pilgrimage will be generously rewarded.

We wished we could have seen more of the city. The main roads leading to the *Haram* are broad and well paved; those leading off them are often narrow and winding, sometimes muddy after rain; but how charming the old Ottoman houses! To me, the delicate carving on wooden balconies, the solid wooden doors with their heavy iron locks and hinges, enhancing the vivid or pale façades, were of unfailing interest. Now and then, a modern office block or apartment building demonstrated the inevitable march of progress. Modern and traditional architecture often blended harmoniously, although one regretted the appearance of those featureless concrete blocks which are to be found in every big Western city.

Little shops sold a variety of imported goods ranging from sophisticated Japanese tape recorders to packets of English cigarettes. There are no theaters, no cinemas, few advertisements, but many café owners entertain their clients with television in the evenings.

The Turkish Tyrant's Ameera owned a set, and sometimes we *Hajas* would watch with her family. Mostly we liked to sit chatting outside on the roof as the nights grew warmer; later we would spread our mattresses out there and go to sleep under the stars.

But now the time had come for us to leave. About a week after our return from Mina, official permission was granted for us all to travel on to Medina. Porters came to fetch the baggage. One by one, we of the Egyptian *Hareem* went to kiss the lady of the house goodbye. I had by this time become less intimidated by her. Perhaps I had imbibed some of the spirit of submissiveness shown toward her by all the *Hajas*. Anyway, I bent to kiss her rosy cheek, and suddenly it was a case of coals of fire be-

cause the trailing end of my veil caught for a moment in the glowing embers of her charcoal burner. I took that as my cue to vanish like the genie in a cloud of smoke.

Yusry and I walked to the *Haram* to make what is known as the *Tawaf* of Farewell, the final circling out of respect to God. Like all pilgrims, we felt very sad at leaving the *Haram*, our inspiration, our comfort, and our refuge for most of the time we had been in Mecca.

Ahmad Kamal has this to say about Mecca: "And yet Mecca is not so much a geographic location, or Pilgrimage, or ritual, as it is a frame of mind. Pilgrims will discover in Mecca only what they take to Mecca. We are not come here in search of inspiration, but because we are inspired. Pilgrimage is a declaration of belief not a search for it."

There is a great deal of truth in what he says, yet I personally would differ with his opinion to the extent that Pilgrimage does mean different things to different pilgrims. My husband, for instance, says that he goes on the *Hajj* to get his spiritual batteries recharged, and to increase the spiritual sensitivity of his heart. For myself, the *Hajj* meant a voyage of discovery ending in the opening of a door to a far deeper spiritual experience, even though my travelling to Mecca was indeed a declaration of faith.

Pictures like visions are indelibly engraved on the mind's eye; the black-robed *Kaabah* with its gold and silver door and richly embroidered golden *Qur'anic* inscriptions, its ever-circling devout worshippers standing out against the surroundings of smooth pale marble. Marble, the smooth expanse of it glimmers iridescent as pearl in one kind of light, translucent as water in another. I would remember the circling faithful in white with now and then a veiled female figure in black *Abaya* beneath which her long dress of flame or emerald strikes a dominant chord of color amid the white and black.

I would remember forever the instant when my lips touched the Black Stone in the hollow worn by the imprint of billions of reverent kisses down through the centuries. Silken and scented with Oriental perfumes, its touch is unlike anything of this world. The consciousness that the Prophet had himself kissed the

Black Stone out of reverence for its association with Abraham and the angel Gabriel filled me with a feeling of awe and wonder at this meeting point of faith, where far distant past and present fuse in a timeless moment.

I would remember the cool forests of marble colonnades and the faithful gathered beneath them, singly, in pairs, or in groups sitting on carpets or on the marble floors, reading the *Qur'an*, praying, reciting aloud, chatting, meditating, resting, or sleeping, a vast family united by faith, the worshippers forever entering or leaving by the numerous doors at all hours of the day or night. I would remember the children running about the marble expanses, the babies tottering on uncertain tiny feet, the lovely latticed windows gleaming like gold.

And, finally, I would remember the sight of those lengths of cotton shroud brought from distant lands to be dipped in sacred *Zemzem* water and carried home with care when the *Hajj* is over, to be kept or given to relatives or friends who will cherish them till the time comes for their use.

Every Muslim grieves at leaving the *Kaabah* and saying farewell to the *Haram*. Having longed so passionately to be there, the heart can hardly bear to leave. The departing *Hajj* will turn to keep the *Kaabah* in sight for as long as he can. At the door he will stand sadly looking his last at the timeless scene.

Now Yusry and I stood halfway up the steps and gazed. Who knew when we would see it again? We did not want to leave that beloved place.

At last we tore ourselves away and walked back to the house where the baggage stood waiting in the street.

We left Mecca at sunset and, after queuing briefly alongside other transport at traffic control for official clearance, were soon speeding over a good road in a fast taxi. We drove through a valley between low, barren hills. Our taxi was averaging about fifty miles an hour, but others were going much faster. The lights of the oncoming traffic were often so dazzlingly bright, the driver was forced to swerve onto the gravel shoulder to give way to some large truck or bus hurtling past. We seemed to drive for hours. It grew colder. At intervals, fluorescent-lit rest houses

flashed by—rectangular concrete or stone pillars supporting wooden rafters above little tables set out beside high woven benches.

I was glad when we drew up at a welcome rest house. Yusry and I were hungry and ordered fried fish with rice from the *Weled* who was actually quite wizened and huddled inside an old army greatcoat against the cold. He brought the fish right away. It tasted salty but delicious.

We drove on for an hour or so, then pulled up for the night at an old rest house thatched with palm fronds. Here one could more easily imagine the camel caravans of only forty years ago halting, partly seen in the softer light of oil lamps, tinkling camel bells announcing the movement of animals in place of the swish of speeding cars and the raucous blare of horns.

Reclining on the high woven seats we sipped comforting hot tea. Yusry was remembering something amusing for suddenly he laughed. "What are you thinking about?" I asked the same question a million wives must put to their husbands every day.

"I was thinking about that fortuneteller you told me you went to back in England years ago. She never foresaw that one day you would be traveling in Saudi Arabia on Pilgrimage to Mecca!"

"No," I agreed. "But she did tell me I would meet my husband in America. Anyway, what made you think of her in the first place?"

"I don't really know. The stars perhaps."

The stars were lovely, brilliant, and cold. Yusry was right. My life had taken an entirely unexpected direction ever since my arrival in Canada.

Suddenly we felt tired. Slipping off our shoes and tucking up our feet under our woollen shawls we soon fell asleep.

Like many others I had been bothered by a bronchial cough with troublesome phlegm, in my case due to a drafty night at *Haj Thakafy's* house. The coldness of the night air and the lightness of my clothing, despite the white woollen shawls we wore over our shoulders when traveling, aggravated my cough, and I woke up feeling rather low. But a good breakfast of boiled eggs and more hot tea soon revived me.

At dawn we started out again, driving through beautiful mountainous scenery. Green oases of palms appeared, and little low houses of mud brick that seemed to rise naturally from the ground. The black mountains loomed nearer, their subtle colors brought out by the rising sun, pink, fawn, gray, green. Then the mountains receded.

* * *

This was the same landscape through which the Prophet Muhammad had journeyed, riding fast with his devoted friend Abu Bakr to escape the fury of the Meccans whose plot to kill Muhammad had failed. He and his followers had endured years of persecution in Mecca culminating in the discovery of the plot to assassinate him. To avoid attracting his enemies' attention, the Prophet had commanded most of his followers to make their way to Medina ahead of him, going separately, while he himself waited for Allah's command to move. Abu Bakr waited too, and the Prophet's cousin Ali, who had bravely agreed to take his place by pretending to be Muhammad sleeping peacefully on the night the assassins were due to strike. On the fateful night, by a miracle, the would-be assassins who were representing different tribes in what was to have been a joint attack, had themselves fallen asleep around the Prophet's house. He was able to slip past them unnoticed and join Abu Bakr. They walked to one of the highest mountains outside the city and climbed to the cave in which they planned to hide. They stayed hidden in the cave for three days. During that time they were almost discovered by a search party of the enemy but were saved by the presence of the spider's web and the nesting doves described earlier in this story.

Now the Prophet was ready to start for Medina, a place which offered safety to him and his companions since two deputations from there had visited him and pledged their belief in the one God and their obedience to His messenger. He now had a strong following of women as well as men in Medina.

The journey by camel took at least a week. The fugitives rode as fast as they could in order to outdistance their pursuers, stop-

ping briefly to pray, rest, eat a handful of dates, or take a drink of water or camel's milk. What joy and relief, when they reached Medina, to be reunited with the rest of their friends, who had been so anxiously waiting for the Messenger of God to arrive safely. His cousin Ali, who had also undertaken to settle some business affairs for him, was able to rejoin the faithful band some three weeks later, traveling on foot all the way. The Prophet's migration to Medina in 622, in Arabic the *Hijra*, marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

* * *

As our taxi's progress became slower, we realized why the driver had preferred stopping for the night. The driving had become an endurance test over bumpy stretches of dirt road, diverted from the main highway which was under construction, around hairpin bends with the sunrise so bright and dazzling, the driver had to shade his eyes with one hand.

This time our traveling companions were Algerian *Hujjaj*. They were, I remember, rather quiet. Yusry and the others spoke little. Intermittently we slept, lulled by the warmth and motion of the car.

We passed patches of dry scrub and dusty-looking trees. The face of the mountains changed from rocky shale to a mixture of boulder-strewn, dried pinkish earth and cleft rock, dotted over with small gray green shrubs.

As we approached Medina, the mountains still loomed to our left. A wide plain stretched to the right. We crossed a small sheet of water. Steel pylons began to march along the roadsides. Goosenecked street lamps marched along the center. Petrol stations, villas, rest houses sprang up suddenly. Then the minarets of Medina appeared—Medina the Illuminated, the city whose inhabitants gave the Prophet and his followers shelter and kindness, whose people above all listened to his message and believed in it.

Throughout all his difficulties and trials, his sufferings and disappointments, the burning faith of the Prophet had never for

one moment wavered. He knew he had been chosen by Allah to deliver a message to the people and nothing could stop him from doing what God had commanded him to do. But the years of persecution and the concern over the safety of his followers must surely have been a great strain. Medina offered safety and the chance of a fresh start. Now the Prophet could begin to consolidate the Muslim community and lay down the foundations for its development as a growing state.

IX

Medina the Illuminated

Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, most solicitous for you, to the believers he is compassionate, merciful.

[The Qur'an]

We stopped outside the Algerian reception building, modern and efficient looking. Across a stretch of ground, low mud-brick houses nestled behind a wall. Palm trees waved gently over their roofs. I sat on our bundle of bedding while Yusry went to find the *Moutawaf* whose name had been given him by a university colleague. It was peaceful sitting there in the sun, half-listening to the voices of the Saudi men who were waiting around to help any pilgrim in need of accommodation.

After about an hour, to my delight, Yusry suddenly appeared waving gaily and riding in a small cart drawn by a large plump white donkey. The baggage was loaded, I perched behind it, and our donkey trotted off with a will, a more cheerful fellow by far than many of his dejected-looking Egyptian relatives. We rattled merrily past plaster and wood façades similar to those in Mecca, except that the houses were not so tall. Modern apartment blocks and hotels stood cheek by jowl with their older neighbors. Little concrete-built shops displayed tins of imported foodstuffs, plump white eggs that I later discovered were often hard-boiled, fruits, watches, jewelry, clothing materials. The cheerful donkey trotted down one main street, across another full of traffic and pulled up at the far side of a broad square apparently used as a parking

place for the mammoth pilgrim trucks. Much of this area was subsequently rebuilt.

The address recommended to Yusry was an old house plastered in white and with the delicate lattices of carved wood, the *Mashrabeya* I had grown to love. The old house next door was painted bright blue.

Yusry had found a room we could have all to ourselves. We were jubilant! An enormous room for just two people, because the house at the time was half-empty! Yusry found out the room was later transformed into the landlord's sitting room, suitably furnished with colorful carpets and cushions, after all the *Hujjaj* had gone. Just then, it was quite bare—nothing but whitewashed walls and a stone floor. Sunlight filtered through the dusty lattice. The floor was filthy and pieces of stale bread lay in the window embrasure, the legacy of former tenants. I found an ancient bristle broom behind the door and swept up the mass of debris and dust.

Once the green rug was spread on the floor and the bedding and luggage arranged along a wall, the Primus in a corner, and the food on a ledge, we began to feel quite comfortable. It was delightful to be on our own again. We realized too, how exhausted we were, now that we had the chance to rest. Even though we had been fortunate enough to be able to travel almost everywhere by taxi instead of crammed in buses or jolted in lorries like most of our fellow-pilgrims, yet the fatigue was still there at the end of the journey. We lay down on the foam mattress kindly supplied by the *Moutawaf* and soon fell into a long dreamless sleep in the peaceful room.

Only a few minutes walk away was the Prophet's mosque. It is much smaller than the other *Haram* in Mecca, so its atmosphere is rather different, in a sense more intimate. The Prophet's mosque has, like the *Haram* in Mecca, been extensively enlarged down through the years. The new part is built around a rectangular graveled courtyard, the sides of which are colonnaded. At night, the myriad lights set in the pillars and ceilings behind golden tracery give the mosque a lovely shimmering quality. Rich red, flowered carpets, gifts from Iran and other Islamic countries,

contrast with the marble columns and floors veined in gray and white. Pigeon's wings flash in the sun as they flutter in the courtyard.

In hot weather, electric fans whirling continuously overhead provide a refreshing breeze. Enormous metal trays placed on the floor hold batteries of pottery vessels full of water for the thirsty, while *Weleds* walk up and down the rows of worshippers handing out free drinks from shallow silvery bowls. Donations, however, are appreciated, especially those which cover the cost of a jugful of water, so that several may drink from it "in the cause of God." Then the donor's parents will be prayed for by the *Weled*.

The older part of the mosque contains the tombs of the Prophet and of two of his closest friends, Abu Bakr and Omar ibnel Khattab. These two men became the first Caliphs after the Prophet's death. To the right of the tombs is the section called the Garden, which is probably named after the grove of palms that grew there in the Prophet's day. These palms were cut down and used in the construction of a simple mosque for the earliest Muslim community. The Prophet and his family lived in little houses beside the mosque of palms, and, when he died, he was laid to rest within the same area. It is only natural that it is beloved by faithful hearts who delight to pray and meditate there.

It is customary on first entering the mosque to visit the Prophet and make salutation to him. On arrival there, Yusry and I tried to approach the tomb but could not get near it because of the dense crowds. The mosque was indeed very crowded though not so much so as the *Haram* in Mecca. We deferred paying our respects beside the tomb till later and, instead, said the short prayers consisting of two ritual bowings and prostrations with recitations from the *Qur'an* which are the traditional salutation to God on entering any mosque except the *Haram* in Mecca. There the sevenfold circling of the *Kaabah* is the pilgrim's salutation to God.

A few days later, Yusry and I were able to approach the Prophet's tomb. It was very early in the morning, soon after the doors opened for the dawn prayer. The tomb itself has a mystery about it. It is surrounded by a delicately wrought metal screen



A street near the outskirts
of Mecca.



A street near the *Haram*.



The Prophet's Mosque in Medina.



Charming Ottoman houses in Medina.



One of the entrances to the Prophet's Mosque.



Waiting for the prayer to begin at the Prophet's Mosque.



Mashrabeya and air conditioning.



A latticed window.



New apartment blocks and old houses.



The modern side of Medina.



Al-Quba Mosque, built on the site of the earliest mosque.

Small old mosque in modern setting.





The souk in Medina.

Street traders in Medina.



Pilgrim buses loading before leaving for Jeddah.



An Afghani inquires the price.



Pilgrims shopping.

Medina the Illuminated

polished bright by the reverent caresses of untold millions of faithful. The shadowy shapes beyond seem to be those of house and street. The Prophet's presence seems very near as one stands there filled with reverence for the messenger of God.

A kindly presence who might readily return the low-voiced greeting of the pilgrim at his door:

"*Assalaamu Alaikom ya Rasoulallah.*" ("Peace be with you O Messenger of God.") "*Wa alaikom assalaam.*" ("And on you be peace.")

Built of pinkish stone by the Turkish Sultan Abdul-Majeed, this older part of the mosque has the famous green dome. Heavy circular pillars have bases ringed with gleaming brass. The ceiling is painted with flowers. Inscriptions from the Holy *Qur'an* are set amidst decorative blue and white floral tiles on the wall opposite the Prophet's tomb.

The atmosphere among the pilgrims was joyful. The *Hajj* proper was over, and the birds of passage had come temporarily to rest in Medina. Everyone could now enjoy spending his time in the Prophet's mosque and visiting places in and around the city of historic interest. The *Ihram* dispensed with, the faithful could wear what they liked, and a wonderful variety of national dress could be seen when the mosque was full at prayer times.

Since it is not so very large, it fills up quickly. Yusry and I went to say the night prayer, but we found it too crowded to get near the doors. We simply spread our prayer mats in the street, together with thousands of others, *Hujjaj* as well as local inhabitants. Opposite where we stood, the employees in a row of little shops all stopped work for the prayers. Managers and staff turned to face Mecca with the rest of the vast congregation. In a lit window above one of the shops, a blurred female figure stood. As the congregation stood, bowed, made prostration, and stood again, the shape behind the frosted glass rose and fell in unison with all of us, in response to each chanted "*Allahou Akbar!*"

Next morning, the sound of voices made me peep through the lattice. A couple of huge pilgrim lorries from Syria were parked outside. Their sides covered in tarpaulin and hung with



A donkey cart brings the baggage.



Starting the journey home.

innumerable baskets, bundles, and tins, they looked like the "Prairie Schooners" of America's Old West. These pilgrim lorries are so high, a small ladder is needed for the passengers to climb aboard. Just then, they were loading up. *Hajas* whose dark bulky clothing made them all appear heavily built climbed slowly aboard, white head kerchiefs relieved the somber black of some. The men in gowns of brown or gray, checked *Kufeyas* on their heads, lashed the bundles of bedding and belongings securely to the lorries' sides. Looking rather worried, the driver supervised the stowing and lashing operation. A blue and white tarpaulin covering the top and sides of the lorry would protect the passengers from the worst of the heat, dust, and wind of the long drive home—a thousand miles through Saudi Arabia and Jordan to Syria.

On Friday night, Yusry and I went again to the *Haram* for the night prayer. The entire square in front of the mosque and the surrounding narrow streets were packed with the faithful. Those without prayer rugs had brought towels, pieces of cardboard, or paper. Others too poor to find even these last prostrated themselves in the dusty street. For had not the Prophet recommended highly the believer who humbly kneels on the ground before his Lord in prayer, and who is not too proud to press his forehead in the dust?

How lovely the *Azhan* is here also, called four times, once from each minaret, and how moving the experience of praying in that setting amidst the vast devoted fellowship of pilgrims! I always found there was a touching quality to the *Qur'anic* recitations included in the prayers or recited separately after them at night. It did not matter that I could only understand an occasional word, because the majestic sounds of the words and the musical way in which they were chanted could easily move me to tears, the more so, of course, when any of the meaning was known to me.

One morning, we got up early to visit the graveyard of the Prophet's friends, as is customary when staying in Medina. Unfortunately, we found that women were not permitted to enter the graveyard. I waited near a little group of other women out-

side the stone walls. Facing us was an area of waste ground, where tradesmen squatted, offering white and colored stones for necklaces and prayer beads. Small boys selling tea by the glass crouched beside boxes spread with oilcloth.

A short procession of men crossed the wasteland to climb the steps to the graveyard. Two men, perhaps Syrians, recited from religious guidebooks to their women who stood like statues swathed in black in the early morning sun.

I peeped through a side door but could see very little. When Yusry rejoined me, he said the walls enclosed a vast area of uneven ground intersected by paved paths. Low stone partitions subdivided the resting places of the Prophet's friends, the graves marked by ordinary stones. Guides conducted visitors wishing to pay their respects to the memories of the illustrious dead. The guides paused beside each grave to salute its occupant and then describe his or her especial good qualities, then ended with a short prayer for the peace of the soul now surely in paradise.

Leaving the graveyard, we shared a taxi with four others on a tour of the holy and historic places. The first of these turned out to be the earliest mosque ever built, Al Quba Mosque. On his arrival the Prophet decided to allow his camel to stop of her own accord outside Medina, and wherever she halted he would construct the first mosque. Al Quba was the chosen place. It lies a short distance from the city, about an hour's walk. The earliest mosque was probably very simply built of stone walls and a thatch of palm fronds. The present mosque (erected on the original site) is not large, but it has an impressive quality about it because of its clean lines of construction and the airy peacefulness of courtyard and interior.

The next place of historic interest was the site of the second great battle of the Muslims against the disbelievers.

* * *

At the Battle of Uhud in the spring of 625, the Muslims were nearly defeated. The Prophet had stationed his archers on the heights with orders to remain at their posts, no mat-

ter what happened. But, as soon as the archers saw the enemy beginning to retreat, most of them abandoned their positions and rushed down eager for booty. Left without protection, the Muslim army now faced the enemy who outnumbered them by more than three to one and who, seeing the Muslims' weakened defenses, rallied to the attack. In the savage fighting that followed, Muhammad's uncle, Hamza, a renowned and unbeaten warrior, was killed, together with many other brave fighters. But the enemy was by this time too exhausted to pursue the Muslims, who had retreated to the hill called Uhud after which the battle was named. This hill had been won from the disbelievers early in the fighting. The Prophet, who had been wounded, and his small band of warriors watched from their vantage point on the hill as the enemy took revenge by mutilating the Muslim dead in a horrifying manner. The Prophet rallied his men and reproached the archers for their disobedience of his orders. The next day, by following the retreating Meccans and lighting a multitude of campfires in the night, he convinced them he now headed a much larger army. The disbelievers were alarmed and fled to the safety of Mecca.

* * *

Today, the battlefield of Uhud is enclosed by an iron grille set in a brick wall, and the brave Hamza's grave is marked by a low stone border. The same rule barring women from entering the graveyard, applied here. It seems the Prophet had decreed this in order to prevent excessive displays of grief in which the female mourners made a great deal of noise, venting their feelings in screams and groans. Later he rescinded this edict, but the *Wahabi* custodians of the holy and historic places keep to the earlier prohibition.

Once, at a funeral in Cairo, I had been startled to hear a couple of the bereaved women shriek and moan in an abandon-

ment of grief. Other ladies with me had assured me such screaming was decidedly not Islamic, but rather pharaonic behavior.

While Yusry visited the graves of the illustrious dead, other *Hajas* and I leaned against the grille and peered inside. In my imagination, I heard the drumming of galloping hooves, the ringing clash of steel on steel, the whistle and thud of deadly shafts.

From Uhud we proceeded to the small mosque with two *Quiblas* (the "Quibla" being the embrasure indicating the direction within the mosque, of Mecca to which all Muslims turn in prayer). In the original mosque on this site, the Prophet and his companions were praying facing toward Jerusalem as was their way at first. Suddenly Muhammad received a revelation to change the direction of prayer and face toward Mecca. We learned that for some time the Prophet had been concerned over this question of the direction of prayer, and here his mind was put at rest.

In this simple, whitewashed mosque, one could more easily imagine those earlier days so charged with faith and inspiration than in the more majestic buildings of recent times.

Up near the roof, a pigeon sat in her nest. So still was she, she seemed like a bird carved of wood. The pilgrims came and went, prayed, recited, and gazed about them below her. She knew no one would disturb her in that peaceful spot.

Our last call was at the area outside the city where the Muslim and the polytheist armies had encamped facing each other for a battle that never took place. History records that the Prophet took the advice of one Salman, a Persian, to dig a ditch in order to prevent the enemy from attacking. This ditch was an innovation in the warfare of those days and did indeed form an insuperable obstacle to the Meccan army. This, together with torrential rain and winds so strong that some tents were blown away, finally put the enemy to flight. During the period of waiting and preparation for the attack, Muhammad and his soldiers built several small mosques, probably of mud-brick and roofed with palm leaves.

On the sites of some of these stand small, modern mosques and the *Hujjaj* entering them say the customary prayer.

Our tour of the historic localities was now over. The taxi deposited us near the house. We bought a few necessities and made our way home for a rest.

Reflecting on our brief stay of a mere week in Medina, certain vivid impressions come to mind. The strongest of these is inevitably the beauty of the Prophet's mosque, its singular charm, the joy of being present there and taking part in the prayers, at one with the vast and ardent congregation. The extraordinary power of the *Qur'anic* recitations that surged and billowed from wall to wall, charming the ears of the rapt listeners who remained after the evening prayers to sit in that exalted, peaceful setting, hearts tuned to the heavenly chanting of Sheikh el Hossary, one of several Egyptian Sheikhs who have spent their lives in the study of the several styles of *Qur'anic* recitation. Then, always, there is the lovely haunting quality of the *Azhan* sounding like a celestial voice from another world and echoed thrice in silvery tones.

The inevitable overlay of the motor age superimposed on the daily life of time-honored tradition provides fascinating contrasts in the form of all the shining new motor transport filling the streets, while the ancient houses look down through their secret latticed windows, keeping their thoughts to themselves. Alas! Fragile and crumbling and too frequently demolished, their numbers are dwindling. Everywhere, small shops open to the street sell every kind of imported goods and provisions. Against this modern façade move the traditionally dressed citizens, the men robed in whitest white, the women swathed in black. A few unveiled women were to be seen, but they invariably looked to be of Negro blood, perhaps descendants of slaves. One glimpsed black-veiled women riding in the back seats of passing cars. It always came as a slight surprise to me to realize that the driver with head enveloped in white scarf was never a woman.

The daily life of Medina, like that of Mecca, is regulated by the call to prayer when shops and businesses close and most male citizens and pilgrims leave whatever they may be doing to hurry

to the mosques or to say the prayers wherever they happen to be. It was always moving to see entire shop staffs turning their faces toward Mecca to pray, deserting their merchandise while trusting in God.

In everyday conversation, the Name of God and that of His Prophet are constantly on the lips of the citizens of Mecca and Medina.

While at times some Saudi men appeared, to Yusry and me, rather proud and unbending after the friendly easygoing manner of the Egyptians, yet on reflection we realized they had every reason to be proud of their glorious past in the early days of Islam and in the enduring power and purity of the faith.

The customary Oriental style of sitting on the floor and reclining on one elbow appeared unaffected by the advent of streamlined Occidental furniture. Shopkeepers hardly used chairs, preferring to recline, Roman fashion, among their goods whether they were relaxing or totting up the accounts.

Yusry and I enjoyed the stay in the old house. Below us, *Hujjaj* arrived and departed. We heard the lilting tones of Syrian *Hajas* as they cooked on flaring Primuses or washed clothes in huge tubs.

Above us, a peep through the open door of the room of our unseen landlady disclosed a charming scene; on the floor was a carpet vividly patterned in red, black, and white. Equally colorful cushions were set against plain white walls. Deep window embrasures had latticed screens of delicate *Mashrabeya*; the whole was like a setting from the Arabian Nights. The *Hareem* life went on, on the upper floors. Although we scarcely saw the lady of the house, I've no doubt she knew all about the comings and goings of her pilgrim tenants below.

Whereas in Mecca the household cleaning used to be done by young houseboys, here two small daughters of the landlady's busily plied a bristle broom at intervals during the day.

Yusry told me how certain aspects of living had improved in Medina since his last visit ten years or so before. The water supply notably was now plentiful enough for every need. In our

house there was always running water in the lower shower and washrooms, in contrast to Mecca where at times it was in short supply.

Then, of course, modern transportation, refrigerators, and air conditioning have vastly improved the food situation in summer.

As in Mecca, the authorities see to it that food is protected by plastic sheeting from flies, and the streets are sprayed frequently with insecticides. The overworked public washrooms are constantly sluiced down with fresh water, thus maintaining a high standard of public health during the exceptionally crowded conditions of the *Hajj*.

After the night prayers and sometimes the additional *Qur'anic* recitations given in the *Haram* by visiting Egyptian sheikhs, the *Hujjaj* enjoy wandering around the fascinating little shops of Medina, which cluster about the Prophet's mosque. They also enjoy taking a simple meal at tables set out in the street. Soup, chicken and rice, meat stews, and cooked vegetables were generally on the menu. Quite a few café proprietors owned television sets, so customers could watch while eating. On our evening strolls, Yusry and I often passed open-air cafés where ghostly white-gowned male audiences gazed at the miniature screens. The snatches of American cowboy and comedy serials we glimpsed must at times have been a bit puzzling to the Saudis. I wondered about the impact of television on the women watching in their homes. Seeing the almost total freedom apparently enjoyed by Western women, did they perhaps long to discard the veil and step out into the world on an equal footing with men? Or did the strict control of tradition upheld by the older generation and the guardians of the faith keep Saudi womanhood willingly secluded?

It should be mentioned here that the status of woman in Islam has always emphasized her dignity as such. A woman has the right to what she earns and the right to her own property, which no one else may touch. In Islam, a woman is free to choose her own husband and retains her maiden name on marriage.

To paraphrase Dr. Muhammed Abdul Rauf's declaration on the subject, in his book *Marriage in Islam*,

... she is entitled to hold a public post to which she is qualified; and no complaint has been heard from female employees in a Muslim land of unequal pay on the ground of sex. . . . Muslim women have held leading posts, including ministerial offices and even governorships, both in early and in modern times. . . . Islam has emphatically urged kind treatment of daughters and made their maintenance a duty on their fathers until after they marry. After marriage the maintenance of the wife becomes an obligation of the husband.*

Another writer, Maryam Jameelah, an American-born convert whose books thunder against the decadence of Western civilization, also writes eloquently of the lofty concept of wifehood and motherhood in Islam:†

First of all, Islam teaches that these womanly functions are no mere degrading drudgery, as they are portrayed in the modern West, but if done to seek the pleasure of God, are enriching and noble tasks. . . . To adequately fulfill her duties to her husband and children is a full-time job which requires almost all the time and energy an average woman possesses. [She goes on to say] On the other hand, if a woman endowed with unusual talents and energy is capable of doing more, so much the better and an Islamic society will not hesitate to utilize her abilities and bestow upon her abundant reward for her services.

Strolling back to the house after the night prayer, I found myself noticing particular things: the hundreds of *Hujjaj* sleeping on the pavement with nothing to cover them but their thin cotton gowns in the chill night air; the cheerful *Weleds* who always served in the cafés. Short, slim, sinewy, and apparently ageless, they darted among the tables in their unique national dress of cap, short-sleeved shirt and, generally, short kilted skirt of checked cotton (which is simply a length of material wound around the waist and tucked into a belt). And there were quiet masculine figures robed in white reclining in high woven seats sipping

**Marriage in Islam*, by Dr. Muhammed Abdul Rauf.

†*Western Civilization Condemned by Itself*, (vol. 1), by Maryam Jameelah (Mohammad Yusuf Khan, Sant Nagar, Lahore).

glasses of tea or Coca-Cola while watching television as the streamlined American cars purred by.

Despite laudable efforts by street cleaners to keep the litter under control, the sheer volume of assorted rubbish left in the wake of the floodtide of humanity spilled over inevitably, and traces of the distressing cough from which large numbers, including myself, suffered. The inflammation in the chest causes an irritating loose cough which brings up sputum. If the unfortunate person with the cough cannot afford to buy handkerchiefs, paper or otherwise, what is he to do but expectorate on the ground? The very poorest sufferers, rather than risk defiling the sacred mosques, carry paper bags or scraps of paper with them in lieu of anything better.

Frankly it must be said that there are a very few Muslims who actually dread going on the Pilgrimage for fear of dirt or disease or some other unpleasantness. I think this problem was rather well put by a friendly colleague at the school where we were both teaching: "You may come across some unpleasant things and a few rather dirty places while on the *Hajj*," she warned me—she was herself a *Haja*—"but these things are quite unimportant compared with the wonder of the spiritual experience."

My friend was absolutely right. The spiritual experience holds a wonder eclipsing everything else, a wonder that causes any disagreeable impression soon to fade into insignificance.

It was always tempting to take another look at the shops for one extra present. Besides a large selection of high-quality imported goods, Medina shops sell pretty rosaries of mother-of-pearl, various stones, different-colored glass and aromatic woods, prayer rugs, miniature *Qur'ans* incorporated into golden medallions, local perfumes for men and incense sticks. Beyond the modern shops are the narrow winding lanes of the old souk. Here, minute shops display heaps of aromatic spices, bottles and vials of exotic perfumes, and baskets of the wide variety of dates for which Medina is famous. One evening, as we walked past the shops, I heard my name called. I turned to see *Haja* Wadida, looking like a different woman, cheerful and well. We embraced and each

rejoiced to see the other looking well. *Haja* Wadida was with the *Haja* I had hoped she might join when they met on arrival in Jeddah. The next moment, the two friends had disappeared in the crowds of pilgrim shoppers.

Usually my husband went for noon prayers at a mosque nearer to the house than the *Haram*. Like the majority of other women, I prayed in the house. Then I would prepare lunch, struggling with the Primus. This was rarely easy to light, then, when it did light, was liable to roar up in an alarming flame before settling down to work properly. When cooking, one was grateful for the safety provided by the stone and concrete floors.

Noises from the street drifted through the lattice. There was an extraordinary cacophony: the steady throb of a concrete mixer; the shouts of Syrian *Hujjaj* just arrived: "Move this!" "Why? I am not your slave!" the cries of young boys playing; the thud of their feet as they jumped on the roofs of the couple of derelict cars nearby; the voices of Sudanese *Hajas* camping in the street asking if they could use some water for cooking; the lowing of cows driven past the front door; the bleating of goats which now and then nosed inside the front door; the chug and bleep of motor scooters; the blare of car horns; the crying of children on the stairs. In the brief intervals of silence, one could distinguish the gentle plop of small bits of debris quietly dropped from an upstairs window onto the roof outside.

The days had flown by, and now it was time to leave. Yusry and I wanted to pay our last respects and to make our farewell *salaams* to the Prophet Muhammad. It was our last night in Medina, and we had stayed behind after the night prayer to enjoy another of Sheikh Hossary's beautiful recitations from the *Qur'an*. We moved toward the older part of the *Haram*, but a fierce looking soldier held up his hand. It seemed women were not allowed to visit the tomb by night. I could have wept. It was as though I were prevented from saying goodbye to a beloved friend.

As a matter of fact, both Yusry and I were keyed up. This was our last night, and the spiritual significance of the place, the peculiar charm of the *Haram* enhanced by the warm light from the rose glass chandeliers in the older section, the moving verses from

the *Qur'an* so musically chanted had brought us both to a highly emotional pitch. I sat there, the chanting still ringing in my ears and feeling myself emotionally spent.

Yusry came to the place where I was sitting, his poor eyes red with weeping.

"I thought to myself, maybe I shall never again be able to pay my respects to the Prophet in this life," he said in a low voice. I too had wept to say goodbye. Surely it was a dearly beloved friend, kind and welcoming, who lived in the shadowed street behind the high green and golden grille. Surely, although his house seemed dark, it was in reality brightly lit by the radiance of his presence and spirit which pervaded the whole mosque.

Yusry and I walked across the carpeted marble floor and out of one of the shining doors.

"Why don't we get up very early before the dawn prayer and come to pay our last respects tomorrow morning?" Yusry suggested. He had asked a soldier whether women were allowed near the Prophet's tomb then and had been told they were.

So the next morning, at about 3:00 A.M., we arrived at the *Haram*. It was quite cold. A slight breeze lifted the canvas lengths stretched across the sleeping shop fronts. A small crowd collected rapidly at each of the main doors, which for some reason had not opened yet. Around us was the murmur of voices, of *Qur'anic* recitation, a spluttering cough. *Hujjaj* found discarded wooden boxes to sit on, quietly telling their rosaries, "Glory to God and Praise be to God and God is Most Great."

At last, the golden doors swung open with a crash. I walked to the women's door, where another crowd had collected.

The dawn prayer over, anyone who wished was able to approach the spot where the Prophet Muhammad, his wife, Aisha, his daughter, Fatima, and his friends, Abu Bakr and Omar Ibkn Khattab, had lived. A multitude of faithful pressed near the green and golden grille. Soldiers guarded the tombs, pushing along gently anyone who tried to kiss or caress the grille, because worship of any being or object other than God is strictly forbidden in the Islamic faith. However, the compulsion to kiss or touch any object sanctified by its relationship to the Prophet is

simply too strong for some of the faithful—those uncomplicated country people from remote places whose dreams of making the *Hajj* were at long last being fulfilled.

Movement was slow toward the tomb, as each *Haj* wished to pause there to pay his respects. In an atmosphere charged with intense yet controlled emotion, the faithful stood and prayed near the tomb or moved around the screened area that had once contained the Prophet's house and the houses of his wife, daughter, and friends, murmuring prayers and gazing at the green and golden screen with tear-bright eyes. Yusry had told me how on the previous night he and an unknown pilgrim standing near had both been overcome with tears, embracing each other wordlessly.

Now we found ourselves opposite the tomb and stood to make our farewells to our master, Muhammad. We spoke low as God commanded the faithful to do in life when addressing the Prophet: "Peace be with you our master Muhammad. May Allah in His Mercy grant you and your wives and family all the blessings of paradise always. Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds. O God! Grant us the chance to come again to Thy Prophet's tomb, O Beneficent, O Merciful."

It was a sad leavetaking, for we did not know if we would ever return. Yet there was a supreme joy in knowing our Pilgrimage and visit to the Prophet's mosque had been completed. The emotional exaltation experienced while making our farewell salutations and the long wait in the cold beforehand had left us sleepy and tired but happy.

Outside we turned for a last long look at the *Haram*. The white marble mosque was breathtakingly lovely; each of its four-tiered minarets was encircled in ropes of lights like shining pearls: the golden windows and doors were shimmering, opalescent. A slender crescent moon rode above one minaret. Stars still glimmered in the lightening sky while the dawn glowed a warm flame on the horizon above the purple rim of the mountains.

X

The Flight's Return

He who accomplishes Pilgrimage out of sincere faith and belief in God shall return home purified as if reborn.

[Saying of the Prophet]

A peep through the *Mashrabeya* on our last day in Medina revealed a familiar scene: a group of African *Hajas* doing their washing at a public tap, the men making ablutions for the noon prayer from small water cans with long spouts; children bouncing in play on the two derelict cars, feet landing on car roofs with a metallic clang; young men riding by on quiet motor scooters, their *Kufeyas* flying behind them.

We finished bundling up the belongings and walked across to the *Moutawaf's* office to arrange for the taxi which arrived soon afterwards; in the meantime three other *Hujjaj* had joined us for the ride back to Jeddah.

For a while we followed the same route as that taken on the way from Mecca, driving through the valley of glittering gravel and small rocks, the barren mountains looking down. Patches of green and yellow lichen splashed the ground. One wonders if this terrain has changed much if at all since the time of the Prophet. Vast and lonely, its colors are subtle grays and browns with dusty gray-green shrubs and trees scattered about. There is hardly a sign of life.

Heading toward higher mountains, a misty violet gray on the horizon, we passed a grove of dry-looking trees. The road began to climb, mountains of reddish-gray shale towering

on either side. A sparse reddish-brown grass grew along the edge of the road.

Oncoming traffic was sporadic: a few trucks, cars, taxis, and empty buses, all heading for Medina.

The only living creatures in that lonely landscape were a woman in black and her flock of black and white goats.

The scanty trees grew a little greener, the mountains, higher, colored in shades of tawny violet, pink, and gray. We reached another *Wadi* and once more headed toward yet higher mountains, driving over an area of parched dry mud and then glittering black gravel. The road cut through the mountains in a series of hairpin bends. Not very far away, we could see a modern highway, American style, under construction. It was operating all the way between Jeddah and Medina when we went on Pilgrimage the second time.

Roofless ruins of a few mud-brick villages made one wonder why they had been abandoned. Perhaps the nearby wells ran dry? We passed oases of sheltering palms and green grass, refreshing and welcome to eyes by now accustomed to the subtle desert tones, then encountered stretches of dark red and brown rock.

A couple of hours' driving brought us to prayer time, and the driver pulled in at an old rest house. We all got out and went to ask for water for the ritual washing. The desert air was clean and fresh. Distant mountains loomed violet against the pale sky.

This was Badr, site of the first great Muslim battle ending in victory and tremendous prestige for the Prophet and his army, despite the enemy host's outnumbering it three to one. The battle was a result of the Meccans' marching in an army one thousand strong, dedicated to wiping out every Muslim in Medina.

* * *

At the head of his army of a mere three hundred or so, the Prophet watched the enemy advance. In the face of such odds, he lifted up his hands to God and prayed fervently for divine help—that his small band of followers might be saved from anni-

hilation. It was a winter's day in 624 when the battle commenced in single combat. To the Meccans' consternation, every one of their contestants—who were specially chosen as champions in the field—was slain. The Muslims then advanced, for the most part, young men inexperienced in war and without horses or adequate arms. They faced a vastly superior enemy force. Although they now held a position ahead of the vitally important wells, the Muslims' situation was a critical one.

At this point, so the devout believe, came the hand of God working in the battle, fully rewarding the Muslims for their undaunted faith. Torrential rains began to fall—rains that refreshed the faithful and made the sand firm beneath their feet but caused panic and confusion among the enemy. Such unflinching bravery as the Prophet and his greatly outnumbered followers had shown in the fighting and then the torrents of rain pelted down, proved to the disbelievers that theirs was not the superior force that day. They retreated in disorder. Islam had won its first battle.

* * *

Once more the taxi swung out into the road. We climbed for a while, passing villages where motor scooters were parked at some doors. There was still no sign of any camels.

The land changed to sandy stretches between the pebbles and rocks, rising in undulating dunes ribbed by the wind. The mountains receded to the distant horizon, palely jagged against an amethyst sky in which small fleecy clouds floated.

As we sped across a broad grassy plain, I saw my first camels, three weeks after arriving in Saudi Arabia. A small herd was grazing near a flock of goats. The grassy plain spread like a tranquil sea around us; flocks of grazing goats moved over its surface.

A second herd of camels appeared with a solitary rider in charge. Strange, that a preconceived picture I had carried for so long in my mind of the Bedouin rider on his camel should materialize only when I was at the point of departure. But I was thankful to have been there at that moment to see man and animal

moving easily together against the lonely grandeur of desert sand and grassy plain under the amethyst sky.

By the time we reached Jeddah, it was dark. Although the fare had been settled in advance, as was customary with the *Moutawaf*, the taxi driver, like his predecessor on the outward journey, demanded *Baksheesh*. This one differed from the other, however, because, instead of quietly pocketing his *Baksheesh* on being informed how much his passengers were prepared to tip, he objected sulkily that it was not enough. The amount was raised, but it still did not satisfy him. The men refused to pay him any more, and in the end he drove off in disgust without taking his passengers any farther.

Yusry and I had promised ourselves the comforts of a modern hotel on our last night. One has to live the primitive life for a while to appreciate fully the comforts of a very ordinary hotel. This one had been highly recommended by a *Haja* of my acquaintance, and it did not disappoint us. Oh, the delight of plenty of hot water, modern sanitation, and, above all, a soft bed on which to rest our weary bones! Waking from the soundest sleep we had had for weeks, we went downstairs to the luxury of omelettes, rolls with a generous amount of butter, and hot coffee.

Jeddah is famous for its shops, and pilgrims with some money and time plan to buy gifts and things that are either unobtainable or else very dear elsewhere. We had quite a few purchases to make for family and friends, so we went out early in search of French perfume, Swiss watches, dress material and children's toys. On leaving the chemist's where we had bought perfume and other items, I was surprised and pleased to be presented with a generous supply of free miniature flacons of perfume plus a large box of the indispensable facial tissues.

Unfortunately, there was not much time to explore Jeddah. Such glimpses as one had of the main streets tended to confirm one's first impression of North American modernity. Walking through back streets to the hotel disclosed time-worn houses, mostly looking sadly neglected compared with their newer neighbors. Brand-new buildings were going up everywhere.

We noticed a laundry situated in one old house. Through the wooden lattice, two men could be seen busily ironing with electric irons. Up-to-date washing machines stood in the background, and masses of washing hung on the line outside.

One observed again the exclusively male staff serving in every shop, café and bank one entered or passed by. Few women were to be seen, and these were usually sitting veiled in the back seats of cars or taxis. Later that day, I noticed European women shopping in trousers or long skirts.

Of course, other pilgrims were also shopping, but the main concourse of them was gathered in the airport area. The street beside the airport building was filled with sitting and reclining figures patiently waiting for news of their planes. Bags and bundles and cooking utensils piled on the pavements lent the scene an odd permanency as if the *Hujjaj*, having spent most of the Pilgrimage living in camp conditions, were prepared to go on camping forever.

Sunset found us in the departure building reserved for Egyptian pilgrims. The hall was crowded with *Hujjaj* eager to take off. The men hung about the inquiry desks for news, while the *Hajas* drooped like weary seagulls perched among the heaps of baggage. White dresses were creased and travel stained. Fresh white dresses would best be kept until safely on board when there would be a chance to change. I recalled the intrepid Gambian grandmother and her pleasure in the anticipation of arriving resplendent in her exotic new costume. I saw a *Haja* waving to me and recognized *Haja* Wadida sitting on her suitcase. She came over to join us for a chat. I believe her friend must have left by an earlier flight, for poor *Haja* Wadida was once again alone.

All of us now had to wait for our passports to be handed back to us from the immigration authorities. The *Hajas* sat about on their baggage, while the *Hajis* tried to hurry things up a bit at the different counters. The hall grew more and more crowded.

Garbled announcements over microphone and loudspeaker informed passengers that the planes scheduled to arrive from Egypt to pick them up had been delayed. Faces brightened, how-

ever, when the first planeload of pilgrims was called to have their luggage weighed and to board the airport buses, only to become downcast again when they trailed back indoors to continue waiting. It had been a false alarm. The hours crept by as everyone waited for more news of the delayed planes.

Meanwhile, the Egyptian and Saudi authorities were doing their best to keep things running smoothly. Considering the vast number of people whose departure was in their hands, the authorities concerned did a marvelous job. No wonder the officials looked tired out; they had probably been working round the clock to get us all safely away.

The hall was becoming very stuffy, and, as everyone's departure would clearly be subject to considerable delay, Yusry and I thought we would take a short walk and get some fresh air. In the street, threading our way between the close-packed groups of *Hujjaj*, I marvelled anew at the hardiness of many of the elderly in particular. How had they found the strength to come? How did they manage to get enough to eat? How long would be their vigil until they could leave for home? Even though these less affluent among the Afghanis, Africans, and Indians were, some of them, physically hardy, yet they must have found the pavement a hard bed. On the other hand, they would not expect comfort if they were very poor, believing any hardship and privation suffered for the sake of answering God's call to be credited to the pilgrim's good deeds on the Day of Judgment.

Keeping to the edge of the road to avoid the busy traffic, we came to the row of brightly lit small shops hoping to tempt the last-minute shopper. On the other side of the road, Afghan and Persian pilgrims had hung up beautiful carpets brought from home to sell to help defray the expenses of the journey.

Suddenly we were surprised and pleased to see two stalwart Russians in belted tunics and boots standing by the roadside. Yusry went over to have a chat with them. They told him in reasonably classical Arabic that they came from Tashkent, where they were looking after a small school for teaching youngsters the faith.

Back at the departure building, we heard the news of con-

tinued delay. It looked as if we would not be leaving before morning, because the officials said the long-awaited planes had been diverted elsewhere.

We prepared to settle down for the night. Everyone was worn out. I curled up on my prayer mat, while Yusry leaned his weary head on his folded arms resting them on the back of his chair. Not far from us, *Haja* Wadida slept, propped against the wall.

We managed to sleep for several hours. At daybreak, the authorities kindly served everyone tea. At last came the good news that the plane scheduled to carry our group had finally arrived. All the *Hujjaj* brightened, stood up, and smoothed their crumpled clothes. We picked up our hand luggage and walked out to the waiting plane.

This time, our seats were next to a window, which made the return flight more enjoyable. *Haja* Wadida sat behind us and Yusry was able to help her in filling out the official forms.

Looking down, I could see we were flying over the Red Sea mistily blue beneath us. Then we were over the desert coast, the desert a dusky pink, the mountains, formations of gray rock. I turned for a last look at the sea lapping the shores, the waters, a greenish blue laced with foam.

Epilogue

It was 1972, and my husband and I had completed the rites of the *Omra*, the lesser Pilgrimage which is made up of the sevenfold walking around the *Kaabah* and the sevenfold walking between the hillocks called Safa and Marwah. We were enjoying a few days' stay in Mecca and decided now was the time to visit the Prophet's cave, something we had long wanted to do. We started out early one morning so as to avoid the heat. It was September, and the weather can be quite hot then.

The taxi put us down at the foot of Mountain Hira'a, one of a chain rising on either side of the valley. We crossed a shallow gravelly slope, passing a derelict lean-to shelter apparently abandoned. A rough path led gradually upwards from here, with rocks set as stepping stones on the way to the barren rocky face of the mountain. At first, Mount Hira'a appears to be fairly low due to a bulging rock formation jutting out about a third of the way below its summit. This mass cuts off the actual peak from sight unless viewed from a distance.

The stony path led upwards, past low thorn trees festooned with strips of cloth, each strip tied to a twig. An ancient superstition which has nothing to do with the faith holds that strips of cloth fastened to a tree or a gate or a place held sacred by those with personal problems will somehow bring them a solution. I remembered noticing the same thing in old Cairo, where an ancient gate was tied with strips of fluttering rag.

Scattered daubs of white and yellow paint on rocks here and there indicated that we were heading in the right direction for the Prophet's cave. The trail seemed to lead off to the left judging by the stray bottle tops, discarded plastic sandals, and empty fruit juice cans that had been carelessly tossed aside by previous

climbers during the last *Hajj* season about six months before. Although one deplored this human desecration of so hallowed a spot, it had to be admitted, the intermittent trail of twentieth-century litter pointed the way for us, since there wasn't a soul about. We toiled along a broad ledge for a while; to our left the mountain sloped down to the valley. To our right it towered above us. A few green shrubs grew here, and thorn bushes snatched at my head veil. Looking ahead, I thought I saw a hollow in the rock face. "Maybe that's the cave?" I wondered. But it turned out to be only a shallow indentation. We pushed on around the side of the mountain as far as another hollow in the rock. Again we found no cave, but from that spot we had a very fine view of the surrounding mountains with Mecca in the distance.

The sun was climbing higher. We decided to abandon the search and turn back. I recalled our landlord's having told Yusry early that morning about how he had tried to find the cave when he was a young man but failed. Then, just as we reached the point where the track veered to the right, leading down, we noticed a second trail beckoning upwards to the left, and disappearing over a ridge. We determined to follow it. At first, the going was easy with broad stepping stones to help the climber. But then the trail dwindled to a very narrow track marked only by little piles of stones placed at intervals. Footholds and handholds became hard to find. Grasping at any firm-looking projection and planting our feet with care, we hauled ourselves up. Now the trail narrowed still more to zigzag between low walls of loose stones. Looking down, we saw we had climbed far above the valley which swept away to the distant mountains.

The sun was growing hot. The trail disappeared altogether. Which way? Just then, we caught sight of a crudely painted yellow arrow pointing upwards.

"Are you all right?" My husband called down as I hoisted myself up the steep rocky slope. Yusry had been climbing ahead of me, nimble as a deer. Truth to tell, the altitude was beginning to make my ears sing, and the unaccustomed exertion was making me a little short of breath. But, after a short rest, I felt ready to go on.

"I think we're nearly there," my husband's voice floated down. We pushed on. We surmounted a final bulge in the mountainside and stood at the peak. A small white building, reduced to ruined walls, was an unexpected sight. Perhaps it had been built as some kind of commemorative shrine which was subsequently destroyed during the uncompromising *Wahabi* purge of anything reminiscent of saint or relic-worship.

A cooling breeze swept over us. We took a few steps to the other side of the peak, and there, just below us, lay the Prophet's cave. A precipitous path led down to it. The cave is situated on a rocky outcrop below the peak, from which it is separated by a deep cleft. Being inexperienced climbers, and rather weary ones at that, we didn't feel up to negotiating that last part of the climb, especially since the narrow path appeared to have a deep drop at either side. We just stood and looked at the cave, the refuge of the Prophet of Islam, and the setting for one of the most glorious experiences ever granted to man, the consequences of which have brought light and meaning to untold millions of lives.

The cave nestles under slanting slabs of rock that seem almost like a portcullis protecting the entrance and commands a magnificent view of the encircling sea of mountain peaks. Far away lies Mecca, a miniature city, in the distant valley. In Muhammad's day, the *Kaabah* was probably the tallest building, surrounded by relatively few walled houses roofed with palm fronds. The rest of the city would probably have been tents.

As one looks in the opposite direction from Mecca, that is, to the north, the mountain peaks rise and fall like waves to the far horizon. The waves are of sand color, of blue gray and sepia with violet-blue shadows. It is the view an eagle would have from his aerie swept by the wind, a place of silence and solitude to which the Prophet was drawn time and time again. Here he would meditate, fast, and pray. And at night under the stars, in the hushed darkness he would lie wrapped in his mantle, his mind filled with the overwhelming consciousness of the one God. Then came that night, majestic and mysterious above all others, when a heavenly messenger appeared to him. That moment in

time and space, when the angel Gabriel came down with the first revelation, is known in Islam as The Call.

As we sat looking out at that landscape, remote, strange, dreamlike as if we had strayed to the surface of another planet, I felt the wind blowing coolly over the mountain peak. It seemed to blow through my very being, leaving it purified. The summit of Mount Hira is a place of spiritual refreshment where thoughts turn to the sublime message first revealed there.

It was time to start back. We began the downward climb, feeling the sun growing hotter. Through the soles of my shoes, I felt the sharpness of stones unnoticed on my upward climb. When we reached the lower slopes, our throats were parched, and, although we had only been out on the mountain about four hours, the time seemed much longer. Our morning climb had certainly demonstrated to us how superb must have been Muhammad's physical condition and how powerful the spiritual call to draw him so often to such an isolated and almost inaccessible spot.

About halfway down, we noticed a solitary taxi leave the distant road and turn toward the mountain.

"Some other people coming to look for the cave perhaps?" Yusry suggested.

"Or maybe he saw us coming down and thought he'd wait for us?"

Jumping, scrambling, and sliding, we made our way down. When at last we reached the bottom, we were surprised and grateful to recognize our driver of the morning.

"You were my responsibility," he told us. "People have gone up there and died of thirst off the *Hajj* season when there are no guides to look after them."

We were touched by his consideration. It had not occurred to us that the mountain's isolation might spell trouble for lone climbers who got into difficulties.

That climb to the Prophet's cave will always remain for us a lovely memory of a shared experience that brought a supremely exalted event from the remote past most vividly to life.

Conclusion

For countless millions of men and women, the massing clouds of hate, doubt, despair and cynicism have no power to obscure the steady radiance of the lamps of the faiths by which they live. For them, the three great monotheistic religions revealed in the Middle East, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, still light the way with their sublime teachings and concepts of the destiny of man.

Islam, an inextinguishable lamp since its revelation 1400 years ago still shines steadily and unchanged, and, year after year unfailingly, the pilgrims travel to Mecca, its heart, guided by the radiance streaming across time and space.

Pilgrimage, the Fifth Pillar of Islam, is a religious duty incumbent on every able Muslim. In the course of the sacred journey, the pilgrim will be subjected to certain physical tests of his forbearance. By the journey's end, he will feel he has approached nearer to God, for Whose sake the journey was made. The pilgrim who humbly carries out the *Hajj* will discover fresh springs to renew his faith. His resolve will be greatly strengthened. With a new-found serenity, he will see the world in a different perspective from before, and he will be conscious of a power strengthening him against the rigors of material life.

Down through the centuries, the miraculous annual migration of the white-robed birds of passage continues, guided by the steadily shining light of Islam, which will, *Inshallah*, continue till the end of time.

God is the Light of the heavens and earth. A likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp, the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star, kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that is

neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil well nigh would shine even if no fire touched it; Light upon light; God guides to His Light whom He will; and God strikes similitudes for men, and God has knowledge of everything.

[The Qur'an]

Glossary of Arabic Words

ALLAH.	God.
ALHAMDOULILLAH.	Praise be to God.
ALLAHOU AKBAR.	God is most Great.
ABAYA.	Full-length wrapper, black for women, brown for men.
ASSUAD.	Black.
AZHAN.	The call to prayer.
BAKSHEESH.	A tip.
BADEIN.	Later on.
EID.	Religious feast.
FATIHA.	Opening verse of the <i>Qur'an</i> .
GALABEYA.	Ankle-length gown worn by Egyptian men.
HADITH.	The sayings of the Prophet.
HAJ.	Male pilgrim.
HAJA.	Female pilgrim.
HUJJAJ.	A group of male and female pilgrims.
HAJJ.	Pilgrimage.
HARAM.	Place sacred to believers and forbidden by God to unbelievers.
HARAAM.	Deed prohibited by religion.
HAREEM.	Women, women's apartments or section set aside for women.
HIJRA.	The Prophet's migration to Medina.
IBLIS.	The Devil.
IHRAM.	Special white dress traditionally worn by pilgrims.
IKAL.	Rope of silk, black, white, gold or silver worn to secure <i>Kufeya</i> to the head.

IMAM.	The leader of the prayers.
INSHALLAH.	If God wills.
ISLAM.	State of submission to the will of God, the Muslim religion.
KAABAH.	The house built by Abraham in the center of the <i>Haram</i> .
KUFEYA.	Headcloth worn by men.
MASHRABEYA.	Carved wooden latticed window.
MOSLEM, MUSLIM.	One who believes in the religion of Islam.
MOUTAWAF.	Pilgrim guide and travel agent.
MOUDIR.	Director.
OMRA.	Lesser or nonobligatory Pilgrimage.
QUIBLA.	The direction of Mecca, toward which the face is turned for prayer. It is shown by a niche in the walls of mosques.
RAKAAH.	Part of the Islamic prayer including one's bowing to God.
RIYAL.	Saudi monetary unit, equivalent to about two shillings or twenty-five cents.
SAIE.	The walking between Safa and Marwah hills.
SHAI.	Tea.
SHEIKH.	A person well versed in Islam.
SHISHA.	Hubble-bubble, water pipe.
SITT.	Lady.
SOUK.	Market.
SOURAH.	Chapter of the <i>Qur'an</i> .
SUNNA.	The practice of the Prophet or tradition recording same.
TAWAF.	Circumambulation of the <i>Kaabah</i> .
THAWB.	Saudi gown for men.
WADI.	Valley.
WAHABI.	Follower of the Islamic leader Muhammad ben Abdul-Wahhab.
WELED.	Boy or servant.

The Five Daily Prayers— Al Salat

FAJR	the Dawn Prayer
ZOHR	the Noon Prayer
ASR	the Afternoon Prayer
MAGHREB	the After-Sunset Prayer
ESHA	the Night Prayer

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